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LETTERS

ON THE

**ETERNAL GENERATION**

OF THE

SON OF GOD,

ADDRESSED TO THE

REV. SAMUEL MILLER, D. D.

BY

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ANDOVER.

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## LETTER I.

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REV. AND DEAR SIR,

THE occasion of addressing the present letters to you may be briefly stated. A passage in the third of your Letters on Unitarianism, addressed to the first Presbyterian Church in the city of Baltimore, in which you have stated your feelings and views in regard to the *eternal generation of the Son of God*, led me to a re-investigation of this subject, so often agitated by the church in ages past. The design of the present letters is to submit to you, and to the Christian public, the result of this investigation, with the reasons by which it appears to me to be supported.

In my letters to the Rev. WILLIAM E. CHANNING, on the doctrine of the Trinity, and of the divine nature of Christ, I have said, (p. 31. 2d edit.) "I am unable to conceive of a definite meaning in the terms *eternal generation*; and I cannot regard them in any other light, than as a palpable contradiction of language." On this subject, however, your views appear to be very different, as they are presented in the following passage from your third letter.

"Nor ought it to give rise to the least difficulty in the minds of any, that the second Person of the Trinity is called the *Son of God*; that He is said to be the only *Begotten Son*, and the *eternally Begotten*. I know that the doctrine of the *eternal generation* of the Son of

God is regarded by many as implying a contradiction in terms. But here again is a most presumptuous assumption of the principle, that God is a being *altogether such an one as ourselves*. Because generation among men necessarily implies *priority*, in the order of time as well as of nature, on the part of the father, and *derivation* and *posteriority* on the part of the son, the objection infers that it must also be so in the Divine nature. But is this a legitimate, is it a rational inference? It certainly is not. That which is true, as it respects the nature of man, may be infinitely removed from the truth, as it respects the eternal God. It has been often well observed, that, with regard to all effects which are *voluntary*, the cause must be prior to the effect; as the father is to the son, in human generation: But that in all that are *necessary*, the effect must be coeval with the cause; as the stream is with the fountain, and light with the sun. Has the sun ever existed a moment without sending out beams? And if the sun had been an eternal being, would there not have been an eternal, necessary emanation of light from it? But God is confessedly eternal. Where, then, is the absurdity or contradiction of an eternal, necessary emanation from Him, or, if you please, an *eternal generation*,—and also an *eternal procession* of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son? To deny the *possibility* of this, or to assert that it is a manifest *contradiction*, either in terms or ideas, is to assert that, although the Father *is* from all eternity, yet He could not *act* from all eternity; which, I will venture to assert, is as UNPHILOSOPHICAL as it is IMPIOUS. Sonship, even among men, implies no personal *inferiority*. A son may be perfectly equal, and is sometimes greatly superior to his father, in every desirable power, and quality: and, in general, he does in fact partake of the same human nature, in all its fullness and perfection, with his parent. But, still, forsooth, it is objected, that we cannot conceive of *generation* in any other sense than as implying *posteriority* and *derivation*. But is not this saying, in other words, that the objector is determined, in the face of all argument, to persist in measuring Jehovah by earthly and human principles? Shall we never have done with such a perverse begging of the question, as illegitimate in reasoning, as it is impious in its spirit? The scriptures declare that Christ is the *Son*, the *only begotten Son* of the Father; to the Son the Father is represented as saying, *Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever*: and concerning himself the Son declares, *I and my Father are one*. This is enough for the christian's faith. He finds no more difficulty in believing this, than in believing that there is an eternal, omniscient and omnipresent Spirit, who made all worlds out of nothing, and upholds them continually by the word of his power.

“I am aware that some who maintain, with great zeal, the Divinity and atonement of Christ, reject his *eternal Sonship*, or *generation*, as being neither consistent with reason, nor taught in scripture. It does not accord, either with my plan or my inclination, to spend much time in animadverting on this aberration, for such I must deem it, from the system of gospel truth. I will only say that, to me, the



doctrine of the eternal Sonship of the Saviour appears to be plainly taught in the word of God, and to be a doctrine of great importance in the economy of salvation. Of course, I view those who reject it, not merely as in error, but in very serious error; an error which, though actually connected with ardent piety, and general orthodoxy, in many who embrace it, has, nevertheless, a very unhappy tendency, and cannot fail, I fear, to draw in its train many mischievous consequences. If the title *Father*, be the distinctive title of the *first* Person of the adorable Trinity, *as such*, does not the correlative title of *Son* seem to be called for by the *second* Person, *as such*? If the second Person of the Trinity is not to be distinguished by the title of *Son*, what *is* his distinguishing title? By what appropriate name are we to know Him, as distinguished from the other Persons? In the form of Baptism, all the friends of orthodoxy grant that the *Father* and the *Holy Ghost* are expressive of divine personal distinctions; but if so, what good reason can be given why the *Son* should be understood differently? In short, my belief is, that the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son, is so closely connected with the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Divine character of the Saviour, that where the former is generally abandoned, neither of the two latter will be long retained. I must therefore, warn you against the error of rejecting this doctrine, even though it come from *the house of a friend*. It is a mystery, but a precious mystery, which seems to be essentially interwoven with the whole substance, as well as language, of the blessed economy of mercy.

“Concerning this eternal generation of the Son, the early Christian writers constantly declared that it was firmly to be believed; but, at the same time, that it was presumptuous to attempt to inquire into the *manner* of it.

“*Irenæus* asserts, that ‘THE SON, FROM ETERNITY, CO-EXISTED WITH THE FATHER; and that from the beginning, he always revealed the Father to angels, and archangels, and principalities and powers, and all to whom it pleased him to reveal him.’\* ”

“*Lactantius*, in his fourth book *De vera Sapientia*, says ‘How, therefore, did the Father beget the Son? These divine works can be known of none, declared by none. But the holy scriptures teach that He is the Son of God, that He is the Word of God.’ ”

“*Ambrose*, in his treatise, *De Fide, ad Gratianum*, speaks in the following decisive and eloquent strain—I inquire of you ‘when and how the Son was begotten? It is impossible for me to know the mystery of this generation. My mind fails; my tongue is silent; and not only mine, but the tongues of angels: it is above principalities, above angels, above the Cherubim, above the Seraphim, above all understanding. Lay thine hand upon thy mouth. It is not lawful to search into these heavenly mysteries. It is lawful to know that he *was* born, but not lawful to examine *how* he was born. The former I dare not deny; the latter I am afraid to inquire into. For if

\* CONTRA HÆRESES, Lib. II. cap 30.

*Paul*, when he was taken up into the third heaven, affirms that the things which he heard could not be uttered, how can we express the mystery of the Divine Generation, which we can neither understand nor see ?

“Let not, then, my Christian Brethren, the charge of ‘mystery,’ or the cant proverb, that ‘where mystery begins, faith and religion end,’ in the least move you. That mystery should be readily allowed to exist every where in God’s *Creation*, and in God’s *Providence*, and at the same time be unceremoniously rejected from God’s *Revelation*, is indeed more than strange ! That creatures who acknowledge that the nature of God is infinitely unlike, and infinitely above, that of any other being in the Universe ; and that their own share of reason is so small that they can scarcely think or speak intelligibly about it, or so much as define their own faculties of reasoning ; should yet refuse to believe any thing of Jehovah which does not accord with human notions ; is, surely, as weak and irrational as it is presumptuous. But that creatures who confess themselves to be miserable *sinner*s, lying at the footstool of mercy, and standing in need of a revelation from God, to teach them, what they could not otherwise know, concerning his perfections, and the way of acceptance with Him ; should yet, when they acknowledge that such a Revelation has been given, undertake to sit in judgment upon it, and to reject such parts of it as are above the grasp of their disordered and enfeebled reason ; argues a degree of daring and infatuated impiety, which, if it were not so common, we should be ready to say could not exist. Wherein does it essentially differ from that temper by which ‘angels became apostate spirits ?” pp. 86—93.

I must frankly acknowledge to you my regret, that I have expressed myself on this subject, in terms so strong. The only apology for this which I can make, is, that at the time when I wrote my Letters, I was not at all apprehensive that the doctrine of *eternal generation* was looked upon, by Christians in our country, to be so precious and important a truth, as your third Letter represents it to be. I knew, indeed, that there were theologians, who received and maintained the doctrine. But I was not conscious that it was regarded in such a light as to call for *zealous* effort to defend it, or that the denial of it would make any breach of entire confidence and charity between Christian brethren. Nothing was more natural than for me to have felt thus. During all

my theological life, I had never once heard the doctrine of eternal generation seriously avowed and defended. Nearly all the ministers in New England, since I have been upon the stage, have, so far as I know their sentiments, united in rejecting it, or at least in regarding it as unimportant. Our most distinguished theologians, for forty years past, have openly declared against it. Multitudes of ministers among us, of distinguished talents and theological knowledge; men of eminent piety, and whose labours have been blessed with such revivals of religion as have scarcely appeared in any country; men whom the church will honour, long after they are dead, as some of her brightest ornaments, as diadems in her crown of glory; men who are not only orthodox, but distinguished champions of orthodoxy; reject, as I have done, the doctrine of eternal generation. Many who are fallen asleep in Jesus, and have gone to be rewarded by that Saviour whom they loved and honoured, were of the same sentiments and character.

If you add to this the consideration, that all my convictions, springing from former examinations of the subject, were, at the time when I wrote, really and truly what my language imports, you will not be surprised, perhaps, that I expressed myself as I have done. But I had no individual, nor any particular class of men in our country, in view, when I thus wrote. Of designed rudeness, then, or disrespect to any particular man, or body of men, I feel myself in no measure conscious. Yet, as some of my Christian brethren appear to have been offended by the strength of my expression on the subject in question, it is matter of regret to me, that I did not make use of terms less adapted to wound the feelings of those, who may differ from me.



I know your excellent character and benevolent spirit too well, to believe that you would write one line in order to wound the feelings of the great body of your clerical brethren in New England, (and of many out of it also,) who reject the doctrine of eternal generation. I will not, therefore, take exceptions at the charge of *impiety*, and of verging to *Unitarian sentiments*, which you have connected with rejecting this doctrine. Though I have the pleasure of only a moderate personal acquaintance with you, I know enough concerning you to believe, that strong as your language is, and high as the nature of the charge might seem to be against your Christian brethren and fellow labourers in the gospel, it proceeds from no ill-will to them; nor from any cause but an honest and well meaning zeal, for what you believe to be truth. I have no disposition to ring the charges about abuse, which the Latitudinarians of our country are continually ringing, merely because a person speaks out his honest feelings respecting their views. They must needs make persecution of it. They seem to me, to *court* persecution with great greediness; for one cannot seriously say that he believes them to be in *dangerous error*, without exciting complaint of abuse, and that the spirit of the dark ages is reviving in our country.

With jealousies like these I am not agitated. I love to hear men honestly and frankly speak out their real feelings. How can truth undergo a fair discussion, on any other ground? And if, in the warmth of honest feeling, some expressions a little too highly coloured escape from them, a generous man, knowing that he himself "is compassed with infirmity," will not dwell with eagerness upon such expressions, nor take any pleasure in imputing to them a wrong spirit.

Whether the rejection of the doctrine of *eternal generation* be so important, and so fraught with danger, as you seem to think, is a proper subject of examination. The doctrine must first be proved to be *true*, before the inference can be fairly drawn, that the rejection of it is impious. But unless it can be made very plain—unless it can be irrefragably proved, perhaps it is not expedient to pronounce the rejection of it to be *impious* and *heretical*; specially if, as is probable, a majority of orthodox Christians in this country reject it.

My great respect and affection for you induced me, when I saw the passage in your Letters above extracted, to pause, and ask; Have I not been rash, in rejecting a doctrine, which so dear a friend and so excellent a minister of Christ regards as thus highly important, and intimately connected with his best hopes and highest happiness?—I was not long, in deciding that it was my duty to reexamine the question. This I have done, so far as my time occupied with pressing official duties would enable me to do; and I now beg the liberty of submitting the result of this investigation to your eye, and to that of the Christian public.

I rejoice that I can engage in this investigation, with the full persuasion, that our difference of opinion about the doctrine in question is not essentially concerned either with piety or Christian brotherhood. With all my heart, I love and honour you as a sincere and eminent Christian, although you differ from me in your views respecting the point before us; and if you cannot return this fraternal feeling, (which however I am not at all inclined to suppose is the fact,) I am well satisfied that it is only because you are honestly and sincerely convinced that I am in an error, which you think dangerous to the best interests of religion.

I approach the subject before me, then, with no other feelings than those of kindness and respect. If I have come to an erroneous conclusion, after a pretty thorough reexamination, it will be matter of gratitude, should you or any other Christian brother show me reasons to believe that my conclusion is groundless. I profess to seek for truth; and if my heart does not deceive me, I do sincerely wish to know the truth, on this subject. I doubt not that you can reciprocate these feelings; and that you will consider with candor what I may allege, in support of the opinion which I have formed.

We will not *dispute*; but it is lawful and Christian to *investigate* and to *discuss*. Truth cannot suffer by this, if we act soberly and with kind feelings, while engaged in discussion.

I am fully aware that some friends, for whom I have a high respect, and to whom I am attached by every tender tie of Christian brotherhood and affection, are apprehensive of evil from a discussion of this subject. I ought rather to say, in justice to them, they are apprehensive that it may turn out to be *dispute* instead of *discussion*. They are afraid that some breach of confidence and affection between the Christian brethren of the North and South, may be the consequence of it. It is impossible for me not to respect such kind and peaceful feelings. And if I thought that they judged rightly of the influence of discussion, I should feel myself bound to acquiesce in their views. But I have not been able, for a single moment, to suppose that our brethren at the South, are not sincerely desirous of having every subject of religious opinion undergo a fair and thorough scrutiny. A man may, indeed, forfeit their good opinion, who wantonly assails any principles which they regard with



serious approbation; or who treats sacred subjects with irreverence and levity; or disputes in a dogmatical, or disrespectful manner. It is proper that they should withhold their confidence from such a man. But that they are unwilling or afraid to discuss any of the principles which they adopt, cannot, for a moment, be credited by any one, who is acquainted with them, and seriously considers the nature of the Protestant principles which they embrace.

Even if this could be supposed of any individuals among them, I am sure that no one, who is well acquainted with you, can suppose that you would either shrink from investigation, or regard it with a jealous or an unfriendly eye. Nothing is more unlike you. I cannot, therefore, feel that there is any hazard in submitting to your eye considerations respecting the subject in question, which are purely historical and theological, and have nothing in them of the nature of personal dispute.

The opponents of orthodox principles have, I well know, often suggested that those who embrace them are afraid of investigation, lest the consequence should be the downfall of their system. I hesitate not to say, that they are very much mistaken. There is another topic, also, on which they love to dwell. When we refrain from discussion, they charge us with fictitious, dissembled unity of sentiment, and give us no credit for real agreement. When we discuss our differences of opinion, they triumphantly allege that the orthodox are no better agreed among themselves, than they are with them. Satisfy them therefore we cannot, neither by our silence, nor by our discussions; unless indeed, they may hope, in case we should fall out among ourselves, that

their own party would chance to gain some accession to it from our numbers.

I will not allege, that it is unbecoming to regard what they may say of our discussions. But as a Protestant I may say, that the love of truth ought to be a consideration predominant over all others. I must say, that the supposition we cannot and may not *discuss* theological questions, about which different opinions are entertained among us, is in fact, (though our friends certainly do not design it to be,) reproachful to us, and to the cause of truth, which we profess above all things to love. What! Have not good men, in every age, differed in regard to their views of some things not fundamental in religion? And are we to suppose, that the period is now come, when even the nicer shades of sentiment either must be, or must be *professed* to be, the same in all? It is useless to claim an imaginary perfection, which does not, and never did, and never will exist, in the present world; and to the cause of truth it would be deleterious, in a high degree, to suppress in any way, or discourage the spirit of inquiry, when conducted with sobriety and decorum.

I am so well persuaded of the truth and propriety of these sentiments, that I cannot hesitate to lay before my Christian brethren, who believe in the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son of God, the following considerations, to invite their examination of this subject. If any of them should think proper to reply to what I may suggest, I can anticipate, with confidence, that it will be done in a friendly and Christian manner. The opponents of our common faith shall not be gratified with our *disputes*. We hope to set them a good example of sober and temperate *discussion*; and to show

them that the orthodox, while they sincerely believe the doctrines which they profess to believe, are ready to discuss, and desirous to illustrate every principle which they receive.

Instead of making divisions between those who love and worship the same God and Saviour, I fully believe that discussion, (such as it ought to be,) will always tend to *prevent* it; and this, in exact proportion to the light which may be thrown by it upon any topic in theology. If our reasons for rejecting the doctrine now to be discussed are valid, can I hesitate to believe that you will incline to our opinion? If you, on the other hand, find them insufficient, and shew them to be so, are we so unreasonable as to persevere in our opinion? I answer, No; and I confidently answer so, because, although I may not be permitted to say it of myself, I can say it of my brethren beloved in the Lord, that they love truth more than they do party-opinions; and that they only need to have the truth clearly developed, in order to embrace it.

On the other hand, if the subject in question should sleep, differences of opinion will still continue to exist, as they now do, respecting it; and the danger that, in such circumstances, this topic will be magnified, and be the occasion of alienated feeling, is certainly not to be overlooked.

I am satisfied that the time has come, when it is necessary to examine well the doctrines which we believe and inculcate. The watchful opponents of our common faith have their eyes on all the steps of its advocates, and will demand a reason for all that they inculcate. But independently of this, the love of truth should be enough to stimulate us to the highest efforts, in order to know what we ought to believe and teach.

We ought highly to venerate the pious fathers in the Church, who have given us summaries of Christian doctrine, which they sincerely believed; but as the ministers of truth, we are obliged to call no man *master* upon earth. We have a heavenly master, who has made his word the supreme and only rule of faith and practice. That word we must investigate, to know whether the doctrines of our Symbols are true; and not taking those doctrines as already established, bring the word of God to their test. Thus lived and acted Luther, Zuingle, Calvin, and all that blessed host of worthies, who burst asunder the bonds of tradition and human authority; and we, their children in respect to professed principles, may venture to walk in their steps.

It is just as much our individual duty now, to bring every principle of the creed of the Protestant Churches to the test of the divine word, as it was the duty of the Reformers to bring that of the Catholics to the test of Scripture. This position is absolutely certain; unless we can prove that the formers of Protestant Symbols were inspired. If they were not, they may have *erred* in some things; and if so, it is important to us, if possible, to know in what they have erred. But how shall we, or how can we know this, unless their creeds are subjected, anew and repeatedly, to the test of the Scriptures?

Will it be said, that the dwarfs of modern days only exhibit their pride and self conceit in attempting a comparison with those giants of yore? If it should, my answer would be; That dwarfs as we are in modern days, we stand, at least, upon the shoulders of those ancient giants, and must needs have a somewhat more extended horizon than they. To speak plainly, the whole word



of God represents the path of the Church, like that of the just, to be as the light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The Kingdom of God always has been, and still is progressive. Glory is bursting in upon the Church, in various ways intimately connected with making her light to shine still more brightly. Is she yet perfected in doctrine? Are all the treasures of the divine word yet unlocked? Are her fairest days past, and her brightest constellations set, to rise no more? The "thousand years" of glory yet to come, will supply a ready answer to these questions.

So long as we profess to be Protestants, and of course profess to believe that the Bible is the *sufficient and only* rule of faith and practice, so long, if we act consistently, we believe in the Symbols of faith which we receive, *only* because we find them supported by the Scriptures. It is not only lawful then to put them to this test; but it is an imperious duty for every man to do it, who is able to do it. There may be a show of modesty and humility in receiving what others have believed, without examination and without scrutiny; but in every case, where there is ability to investigate and bring to the Scripture test, a failure to do it must arise from undue regard to the authority of fallible men, or from mere inaction—from absolute sloth.

Such are the sentiments, which, with all my reverence for the Reformers and for our Symbols of Faith, I entertain; and which I do not hesitate openly to avow, and am not unwilling to defend. And such, I doubt not, are your views and feelings. Such, indeed, are the sentiments which you have expressed; and to which I shall have occasion to advert, in the commencement of my next Letter.

I cannot close the present without adding, that, placed in the situation where you and I are, with our responsibilities for what we teach, Scriptural investigation of every doctrine connected with the Christian religion, becomes doubly a duty.

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## LETTER II.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

IT is grateful to find that your sentiments, in respect to the real foundation of Christian doctrines, agree so entirely with mine; and I trust I may add, with the fundamental principles of the Protestant religion. In pp. 100, 101, &c, of your Letters, you have undertaken to show and reprove the "weakness" of Unitarians, in attempting to support their views by the *authority of great names*. You say, p. 101, "The weakness of this plea is so obvious, that a formal refutation of it will not be thought necessary, by any impartial reader." In the sequel, you say very justly, that Transubstantiation and other "gross errors and most wretched superstitions" might be proved to be true, if this mode of argument could be adopted.

In Letter IV, p. 111, you say, "The word of God, as the orthodox believe, is the only certain test of divine truth; the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Of course, that which is not found in Scripture, however extensively and unanimously it may have been received by those who love the Christian name, must be rejected, as forming no part of the precious system, which God has revealed to man for his salvation." You then



proceed to observe, that still there is consolation as well as duty in walking in the steps of the pious, who have agreed in the doctrines of the gospel.

All this I most freely and fully admit. I will only add, that the fact of Christians having been agreed in a doctrine, is not sufficient of itself to make the reception of it consolatory. It must prove, on *examination*, to be *really a doctrine of the gospel*, in order to afford the consolation which we may receive from union of sentiment; for as you say, however *extensively and unanimously* those who bore the Christian name have received error, it is no reason for our admitting it.

So far then as the simple investigation of the truth is concerned, in respect to any point in theology, the *authority* of great names is not to be regarded as obligatory. And in respect to the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son of God, it will not prove the correctness or incorrectness of it, to show that the early Christian fathers admitted or rejected it. In discussion purely theological, therefore, any appeal to the fathers might well be spared.

My reasons for a historical investigation, at present, of what the early fathers did really believe and teach in regard to the point in question, may be briefly stated. You have appealed to them, with full persuasion that their sentiments harmonized with yours. Others have often done the same; and specially since the publication of Bishop Bull's learned work, entitled *Defensio Fidei Nicaenae*. I am prepared to admit, that if it could be shewn that the early fathers, as you have said, p. 91, "*constantly* declared that the doctrine of eternal generation was to be believed," it would be an additional confirmation of the doctrine; because it would serve to

evinced, that the arguments by which it is supported were so plain and cogent, that a general assent had been compelled to them, in very ancient times. But since my persuasion is, that the doctrine cannot be established either by the Scriptures, or by principles of reasoning deduced from the essential predicates of the Deity; with my present views I should decline to follow the opinion of the fathers, provided it is in unison with yours. Still, I feel it to be a very interesting topic of examination. It is more specially so, because, although as Protestants we do not admit the binding authority of the fathers, yet the belief that they received the doctrine of eternal generation, has had no small influence in fostering a confidence in that doctrine, and a repugnance to any opinion subversive of it. It is on this ground, I must beg the liberty, in the present letter, to lay before you the results of a patristical investigation somewhat extensive; in order that I may remove, if possible, from the minds of those who may read these letters, the apprehension that I am endeavouring to overthrow the faith of the ancient Church, and to establish a novel or heretical opinion, while I examine the doctrine of eternal generation, and endeavour to show that it will not bear the test of either Scripture or reason.

As a preliminary step then to the discussion which is to follow, and for the sake of preparing the way for an unprejudiced judgment respecting the point in question, you will permit me to examine whether the declaration which you have made, in p. 91, respecting the unanimity of the early Christian writers in the belief of eternal generation, is well grounded.

We shall doubtless be agreed, that by the *early* Christian writers is meant, the Fathers who lived before the

Council of Nice or during the three first Centuries. This is a fair construction of the term *early*, and one which is generally admitted. At any rate, we shall agree, that the opinions of the Fathers, during this period, are more important in regard to the doctrines of the Church, than those of a subsequent date.

I begin, then, with giving the result of my investigations respecting the three first Centuries. It is this; viz. that *the great body of the early and influential Christian Fathers*, whose works are extant, *believed that the Son of God was begotten at a period not long before the creation of the world*; or, in other words, that *he became a separate hypostasis, at or near the time, when the work of creation was to be performed*. If this can be shewn, the fact that they believed in the *eternal* generation of the Son of God, or at least, their *unanimity* in receiving this doctrine, cannot surely be admitted.

Before I proceed to adduce testimonies in support of this allegation, it will be proper to remark, that I intend to confine myself solely to the testimony, which relates to two inquiries; viz, *Is the generation of the Son of God eternal? And is that generation voluntary, or necessary*. The reason why I comprise the latter inquiry is, that in your Letters, p. 87, you have laid such important stress, (as many others have done,) upon *necessary generation*, as helping to remove the difficulties that lie in the way of admitting the doctrine in question.

With the question, whether the fathers believed Christ to be truly a divine person and worshipped him as such, I am not now at all concerned. Of course, I shall adduce no testimony which respects their opinion on that point, except what may be necessarily adduced, in consequence of its connexion with other testimony relative to the subject before us.



The historical questions before us are, *Did the early fathers believe the filiation or generation of the Son of God to be eternal, in the proper sense of the word eternal? Or in other words, Did they believe that the Logos was not only eternal, but that he was Son eternally? And did the early fathers believe this generation to be necessary?*

That the Logos is truly eternal, I believe with all my heart, because, as it appears to me, the testimony of Scripture is so plain and unequivocal on this point, as to admit of no reasonable doubt, in the mind of a man who receives the Bible as the word of God, and the unerring rule of faith. That the Logos was eternally the *Son of God*, I doubt; for reasons which will hereafter be stated.

I have made this statement merely to show, in what manner the testimony of writers relative to the point in question is to be estimated. To say of Christ, or of the Logos, that he is *eternal*, is saying nothing more, than what all who acknowledge the divine nature of the Saviour of course must say. But if this should be said a thousand times, it would not of itself prove any thing in respect to the doctrine of *eternal generation*. It would only prove, that the writer or speaker, who asserts it, believes Christ to possess a divine nature; inasmuch as he assigns to him one of the attributes of the Deity.

This very plain but important principle, which should be applied in estimating the testimony to be adduced, has been entirely overlooked by Bishop Bull, in his *Defensio Fidei Nicaenae*. We shall find frequent occasion to acknowledge the importance of the principle, in judging of patristical testimony; for many of the leading Fathers, while they believed fully in the eternity of the Logos, considered as the reason or understanding of

the Divine Nature, which they name *λογος ενδιαθειος* i. e. *the internal Logos*, maintained that he became *Son*, (*λογος προφορικος*, *eternal, produced, or generated Logos*,) at or near the time, when the creation of the world took place. Now so long as this distinction was adopted, and became the common sentiment of the Antenicene fathers, merely an assertion that Christ, or the Son, or the Logos was eternal, cannot be regarded as testimony adequate to prove a belief in the doctrine of *eternal generation*; unless it appears, from other parts of a writer's works, that he really maintained this doctrine. Above all, such testimony is entirely nugatory, in regard to establishing the point in question, if the writer has *expressly* declared his views, in regard to the simple antemundane (not eternal) generation of the Son.

Let us now proceed to adduce our testimony. In the Epistles of Clemens Romanus, (only one of which however is genuine;) and in the letter of Barnabas, I find nothing which has any bearing upon the point under examination. Indeed, Bishop Bull himself, familiar as he was with the Fathers, and strenuous as he was, in the highest degree, respecting the point in question, has brought forward in his famous chapter *De Filio συναιδιω cum Patre*, but one solitary passage in favour of eternal generation, from any of the Fathers, *who preceded Justin Martyr*. This is from the epistles of Ignatius. In its proper place, I shall examine it.

In the Shepherd of Hermas, a writer cotemporary with Clemens Romanus, there are some passages which seem to relate to the point in question, but which Bishop Bull has omitted. "God," says he, "placed that *holy Spirit*,\* *which was created first of all*, in the

\* Many of the early Fathers called the exalted nature, which they attributed to Christ, *πνευμα ἅγιον*.

body in which he might dwell, in the chosen body which seemed proper to him."\* Again; "The Son of God is more ancient than every creature, so THAT he was present in council with his Father, when the world was created."†

That the phrase *holy Spirit*, in the above quotation, means the exalted nature which dwelt in Christ, there can be no doubt; inasmuch as the context clearly describes the incarnation of the Saviour. The second quotation seems pretty plainly to intimate what we are to understand by the affirmation of Hermas in the first, when he says that the exalted nature of Christ *was created first of all*; viz, he was created more anciently than every creature, *ita ut, so that, (so anciently that,)* he was present in the counsels of the Father, at the creation, &c.

I make but one remark on the word *created*, as applied to the more exalted nature of the Son. The early Fathers were not grammarians nor philologists. Nothing is more evident, as we may have opportunity to see in the sequel, than that many of the Fathers made no difference between the words *creation* and *generation*, when applied to the Son. It was not until near the time of Arius, that the word *creation* became limited to a *strict* sense in relation to the origin of the Son of God, and became the subject of warm and protracted dispute.

\* *Illum spiritum Sanctum, qui creatus est omnium primus, in corpore in quo habitaret deus collocavit; in delecto corpore quod ei videbatur. Simil. V. § 6.* Such is the reading which Roesler gives, from a choice of the varieties in the best MSS. (Biblioth. B. I.) In Cotelerius, (Tom. I. p. 107) the text stands somewhat differently; but the varieties of the principal MSS. are exhibited in the margin, the best of which give the text above.

† *Filius quidem Dei omni creatura antiquior est, ita ut in consilio Patri suo adfuerit, ad condendam creaturam. Simil IX. § 12. Coteler. Tom. I. p. 118.*



I will not say, that the sentiments of **Hermas** are altogether clear, in respect to the simple *antemundane*\* generation or creation of the Son of God. Thus much however is clear, that they appear to be irreconcilable with the absolute eternity of filiation. We shall see, in the sequel, that the natural explanation which they admit coincides altogether with the predominant opinion of the Antenicene Fathers.

#### IGNATIUS.

We come next to the Letters of **Ignatius**, bishop of Antioch, who flourished about the close of the first century. Of the fifteen letters which bear his name, only seven have met with reception among the learned as genuine. These also have been doubted by some of the most able critics and ecclesiastical historians. Calvin, the Magdeburg Centuriators, Blondell, Salmasius, Daille Semler, Ernesti, Roesler, and many others have rejected them as spurious; and, to say the least, their authenticity is altogether of so doubtful a nature, that no certain reliance can be placed on them. Of course, we cannot be sure that we have, in them, the real views of Ignatius himself.

I will limit myself to a few remarks on the passage quoted from them by Bishop Bull, in commenting on which he has occupied twelve folio pages. The passage follows: "There is one God who revealed himself by Jesus Christ his Son, who is his eternal Logos, not pro-

\* I use the word *antemundane*, to signify what took place within some *limited* period before the creation, but not to designate, even by implication, what is properly eternal. I do this merely to avoid circumlocution, and to save time.

ceeding from Silence.”\* If we grant that the latter clause, “not proceeding from Silence,” is opposed, as the Bishop has endeavoured to show, to some of the Gnostic doctrines, which taught that the Logos was a secondary emanation from *Σιγη* or *Silence*; the objection to the genuineness of the passage, made because it has been supposed to refer to the errors of Valentine, who was of a later age than Ignatius, may be removed. But whether this is to be granted, is matter of controversy.

That the Logos is eternal, (*αἰδιος*,) the writer of this Epistle plainly asserts; but that the generation or procession of the Logos is eternal, is not asserted. Whether he supposed him to be eternal as *immanent* (*ενδιαθετος*,) or as *emanated* (*προφορικος*,) does not appear from this passage. From another passage in the same Letter, cited in the note below, the former is the most probable.

Two special difficulties lie in the way, then, of finding among the early fathers support for the doctrine in question, from the passage under review. The first, that the great majority of the ablest patristical critics deny or strongly doubt the genuineness of the Epistles ascribed to Ignatius; the second, that admitting their genuineness, the proof from the passage quoted can, at best, be regarded as only of a very doubtful nature.

If there be any doubt as to the sufficiency of the reasons why the passage in question should receive such a construction, as I have given to it, the testimony hereaf-

\* *Εἰς θεος ἐστιν, ὃ φανερωσας ἑαυτον δια Ἰησου Χριστου του υἱου αυτου, ὃς ἐστιν αυτου λογος αἰδιος, ουκ απο Σιγης προελθων.* Epist. ad Magnes. § 8. In another place, (§ 6 of the same Letter,) he says, *Χριστος ὃς προ αιωνων παρα πατρι ην.*

ter to be adduced from other Fathers will probably dissipate this doubt.

JUSTIN MARTYR.

This distinguished Father, a native of Flavia Neapolis in Samaria, and a heathen philosopher before his conversion to Christianity, flourished about the middle of the second Century, and died in A. D. 165, as a martyr to the Christian religion. Of the various works attributed to him, his two Apologies for Christianity, and his Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, are the most important, and the only ones of which the genuineness is in any good degree certain.

I proceed to develope the evidences of his opinion, in respect to the generation of the Son. "God," says he, "in the beginning, before any thing was created, begat a Rational Power, (*δυναμιν λογικην*) from himself; which is called by the Holy Ghost, Glory of the Lord, and sometimes *Son*, Wisdom, Angel, God, Lord, Logos. Sometimes also he calls him *Leader*, (*αρχιστρατηγον*.) In the form of a man he appeared to Joshua, the son of Nun. All the above names he bears, because he ministers to the will of the Father, and *was begotten by the will of the Father.*"\* To show the probability of this,

\* —*αρχην, προ παντων των κτισματων, ο Θεος γεγεννηκε δυναμιν τινα εξ εαυτου λογικην* — *εχειν γαρ παντα προσονομαζεσθαι, εκ τε του υπηρξειν τη πατρικη βουληματι, και εκ του απο του πατρος θελησει γεγεννησθαι.* Dialog. cum Tryphone, § 61, p. 157. edit. 1642. It may be proper to observe here, once for all, that (to save time and paper) only the more *important* parts of the originals are quoted in the Notes. Of parts omitted, notice is given by a Dash. If any reader doubts the correctness of the translation, as to passages the original of which is omitted, he has the means of correcting it placed in his power, by uniform reference to the places, where the whole passages extracted may be found.

he then proceeds ; “ Something like this, we see happens to ourselves. When we utter a reasonable word, we beget reason (*λογον* ; ) but not by abscission (*αποιομην*,) so that our reason is diminished. Another thing like this we see, in respect to fire ; which suffers no diminution by kindling another fire, but still remains the same.”\*

Two points are here clearly asserted. First, the *Logos*, before creation, was produced or generated from God, *ἐξ ἑαυτου* ; and secondly, he was begotten (not necessarily, but) by the will of the Father. The simile which follows the first statement, makes Justin’s conceptions on the subject of the *Logos* very plain. He was in the Father, before his birth or generation, as reason is in us, which originates language ; i. e. he was originally *Logos immanent*, (*λογος ενδιαθειος*, as he was soon after called by other Fathers, who adopted Justin’s views ; ) but before the creation, he was begotten, produced out of the Father, as a word which originates from reason is uttered ; and thus became Son of God, or *λογος προφορικος*.

The *Logos* was undoubtedly believed by Justin to be eternal. But he was eternal as the Reason or Understanding of the Father ; not eternally begotten. If there be any doubt left here, as to Justin’s views, the following passage will dissipate it. “ The Father of the universe, who is unbegotten, has no name ; for to have a proper name, implies that there is one antecedent to the

\* As this is mere explanation, it is unnecessary to cite the Greek. The *αλλ’ ου*, which stands at the beginning of the Greek of this passage, is undoubtedly spurious ; or if not so, it is to be read interrogatively, as in the London edition. See the Note on it in the Benedictine edition, from which I quote.



person named, who has given the appellation. For the titles, Father, God, Creator, Lord, Sovereign, are not properly *names*, but appellations deduced from his beneficence and his operations. But his Son, who only is properly called Son, the Logos, *who existed with him before the creation, and was generated when (ὅτε) in the beginning he created and adorned all things by him*, is called Christ, because God anointed and adorned all things by him.”\*

This passage leaves no room for doubt. The Father can have no name, because no being existed before him to give it. The Son can *properly* have a name; for he was begotten in time, i.e. at or near the creation of the world, which was accomplished by him. The *immanent* Logos seems to be acknowledged as *eternal*; but his generation is definitely stated to be only antemundane. He was *συνων*, *coexisting* with the Father, or existing in him, before the creation; but *γεννωμενος* *begotten* in time, or *when (ὅτε)* the act of creation was about to be performed.

In conformity with this, Justin, in his second Apology,<sup>m</sup> speaks of the Logos *σπέρματικος*, i. e. *begotten, seminal*; in distinction, as it would seem, from the Logos in his previous state, or before his birth. The passage, in which the appellation stands, is one where Justin declares that the Logos, or rather portions of the Logos or Reason, have dwelt in all distinguished men of every age and nation, who have spoken or written well. “It is the Christ, the first-born of God—who is the

\* ὁ δε υἱος εκεινου, ὁ μονος λεγομενος κυριως υἱος, ὁ λογος προ των ποιηματοιν και συνων, και γεννωμενος ὅτε την αρχην δε αυτου παντα εκτισε και εκοσμησε, Χριστος, κ. τ. λ. Apol. II. § 6.

Logos, of which all men are partakers.”\* *Σπνευματικος*, then, is evidently an epithet intended to designate the Logos as *begotten*, or the *first born* of God.

One other passage, to confirm the fact that Justin viewed the generation of the Son as proceeding *from the will* of the Father, and therefore not as *necessary*. “We have the Son of God described in the memoirs of the Apostles; and we call him the Son of God, and consider him as coming forth (*προελθοντα*, issuing out) from the Father, before the creation, *by his power and will.*”†

With Justin’s sentiments on the real and proper divinity of the Logos, I am not now concerned; and shall not therefore say any thing here respecting them. My business is not to examine his creed in general; but only whether he believed in the *eternal* and *necessary* generation of the Son. It is very remarkable that Bishop Bull should have quoted the passage just cited above from the Second Apology of Justin, (§ 6,) to prove that this father believed the doctrine of *eternal generation*, which clearly establishes the fact, that he was of the opposite opinion. But there is, indeed, no difficulty in coming to such a conclusion, if one may take the liberties, which the Bishop has taken, with the text of his author. The words, *ὁ δε υἱος εκεινου, ὁ μονος λεγομενος κυριως υἱος*, &c, he translates, “Porro filius ejus, qui solus propriè dicitur filius, Verbum simul cum illo ante creaturas et existens et nascens, quoniam primitus per eum cuncta condidit,” &c. And in his comment he says, “In his verbis docet Justinus, Deo Patri *et Filio* nullum propriè nomen competere, sed tantum appellationes quas-

\* Apol. II. § 13.

† *νενοηκαμεν και προ παντων ποιηματων απο του πατρος δυναμει αυτου και βουλη προελθοντα* κ. τ. λ. Dial. cum Trypho. § 100.

dam ab ipsorum beneficiis et operibus petitas, ipsis a nobis tribui. Hujus autem assertionis rationem hanc affert, quod Deus Pater ingenitus atque eternus sit ; Filius vero ut Verbum ejus ipsi coexistat, ac proinde uterque neminem habeat se antiquiorem, qui ipsi nomen imposuit."

Very different from the Bishop's translation is that of the learned Benedictine, the editor of Justin. Instead of " Verbum *simul cum illo* ante creaturas existens et nascens, QUONIAM primitus per eum condidit," we have nearly an exact version of the Greek ; " Verbum antequam mundus crearetur, quod et una cum eo aderat, et genitum est, CUM per illud initio omnia condidit," &c. Instead of translating, then, as the Greek runs, *begotten when* (ὅτε) *in the beginning he created all things by him*, the Bishop has contrived to throw back the word *begotten* upon the preceding clause, for the sake of joining it with *προ των ποιηματων*, and so rendered *ante creaturas et existens et nascens, both existing and born before creation ;* while ὅτε has been converted by him into ὅτι, and rendered by the patristic Latin conjunction *quoniam* in the sense of *because* or *since*. For his manner of pointing the sentence some apology might be made ; because, by itself considered, it is a *possible* construction. For changing the text without any authority or necessity, all apology is out of question.

But the comment is, if possible, more against the spirit of Justin, than the version. Justin says that the Father has no name, because he is *unbegotten* and has no predecessor to name him ; but, on the other hand, the Son has a name, as he is begotten in time, and his name is derived from his anointing the creation. The Bishop says, " By these words Justin teaches, that no name

properly belongs to the Father *and the Son*, but that only certain appellations are attributed *to them* by us, as derived from *their* beneficence and *their* operations.”— But Justin says this *only of the Father*; and places the case of the Son in *direct antithesis* to all this.

Again; the reason why no name is given to the Father *and the Son*, the Bishop represents to be, that “the Father is unbegotten and eternal—and the Son is his coexistent Word; and therefore, *neither* has any one more ancient than himself, who could impose a name upon him.” Whereas Justin Martyr not only asserts that the Son is *properly* named, but assigns the reason of it, by alleging the fact, that he was “begotten *when* the world was created.”

The Bishop then proceeds to quote a long passage from Justin’s Cohortatio ad Græcos, (the genuineness of the Cohortation is disputed,) the object of which is to show, that when Jehovah revealed himself to Moses, he did not call himself by any name, and properly could have none. He only said, *I am that I am*. Now as Justin, in his Dialogue with Trypho, maintains that the Logos only was revealed to the Patriarchs, Bishop Bull concludes that Justin must have held, that the unknown Name, (if I may so speak) belonged to the Son, and that therefore he was regarded by Justin as eternal.

If the passage were known to be genuine; and Justin could be proved to be always a reasoner, whom later writers, with more purified and elevated ideas of the nature of the divine Being, would call *consistent*; the conclusion of Bishop Bull might be admitted. But if we do admit it, it does not touch the point in question. That the Logos was *eternal* as immanent, there can be little or no doubt Justin believed. But that he was



generated from eternity, never, I apprehend, once entered Justin's mind; or if it did, his language appears to speak, by every fair rule of construction, an opinion directly the reverse.

One other passage the Bishop has quoted, from the Epistle to Diognetus; (the authenticity of which epistle is generally denied, or doubted.) In this, it is said of the Son, *οὗτος ὁ αἰ, σημερον υἱος λογισθεις*. In the same passage, a few words before, it is said of this same Logos, *καινος φανεις*, who appeared anew; how or where is not declared, for there is a hiatus in the text immediately after. But the words immediately antecedent are *ὁ ἀπ' αρχης*; so that the sense seems to be, *He who was from the beginning, appeared anew*, (probably to the patriarchs, &c.) The sequel is, *For he is continually produced [or begotten] anew in the hearts of the saints*. Then follows *ὁ οὗτος αἰ, σημερον υἱος λογισθεις*; from which I should derive, as before, a view of the sentiments of the writer, directly opposite to that which the Bishop has derived—viz, the Logos (*ενδιαθετος*) is eternal, as to his existence; but in regard to his Sonship, *υἱος λογισθεις* he is reckoned Son *σημερον*, at present, to-day. This sentiment coincides, whoever was the writer, with the views of Justin as already given.

Such are Bishop Bull's proofs of eternal generation from Justin. Why he should have passed over in silence all the passages which militate so directly, or at least seem to militate so directly, against the assertion that Justin held this doctrine, is a question which I shall not undertake to answer.

The principal passage of Scripture, which seems to have led Justin to his views respecting the generation of the Logos, is found in Prov. 8:22; for of the New

Testament, he has made no use in proving his doctrines. This passage, according to the Septuagint translation which Justin used, runs thus; "In the beginning of his ways, the Lord **CREATED** me for his works." It is a part of the beautiful prosopopeia of wisdom, which the chapter contains to which this verse refers; and which Justin, with almost all the Christian Fathers, applied to the Logos. As Justin knew nothing of the original Hebrew, he possessed no means of correcting the Septuagint version of this passage; and therefore built his speculations about the generation of the Logos upon it. He appears to have taken no offence at the word *created* (*ἐκτίσθαι*) here; nor did the *early* Fathers consider it a matter of importance, whether they used the word *ἐκτίσθαι* or *ἐγεννήσθαι*; for they had not yet learned the art of logomachy, so well as it was understood in after ages.

The Hebrew of this passage runs thus; "Jehovah **POSSESSED** me in the beginning of his way; before his works, even from ancient time (*מִנְּקִדְמֵי*)." Even after Origen had shown the difference between the Septuagint and the Hebrew, the Fathers still continued to use the Greek text with *ἐκτίσθαι* in it; a proof that speculation on the definite sense of this word, had not yet come into vogue; but not a proof, as any one versed in a moderate degree with the patristical dialect will see, that the Fathers believed as Arius did, that the Logos was *properly* a created being. In the same passage, they use indiscriminately *ἐκτίσθαι* and *ἐγεννήσθαι*, as applied to the Son, commuting the one for the other.

## ATHENAGORAS

was at first an Athenian philosopher. He became a convert to Christianity about A. D. 150 ; and wrote his Apology, (*Προσβεια*, Legatio,) addressed to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus, about A. D. 177.

In this Apology, § 10, stands the following remarkable passage. “I have sufficiently proved that we (Christians,) are not atheists, who believe in one eternal God, unbegotten, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, known only by reason and understanding, surrounded by light, and beauty, and spirit, and indescribable power; who by his *Word*, created, adorned, and preserves all things. We acknowledge also, a Son of God. Nor must any one think it ridiculous, that God should have a Son. For not as the poets feign, who exhibit gods nothing better than men, do we think, either concerning God the Father, or concerning the Son. But the Son of God is the *Word* of the Father, in idea and in operation; for by him and through him were all things made, inasmuch as the Father and Son are one. The Son, moreover, being in the Father, and the Father in the Son, by a oneness and energy of spirit; the Son of God is the understanding and reason (*νοῦς καὶ λόγος*) of the Father.—What the Son is, I will briefly declare. He is the *first progeny* (*γεννημα*) of the Father, not as made, (for God, from the first, being eternal understanding, *νοῦς*, had the *Logos* in himself, being eternally a reasonable Intelligence;) but *he came forth* to be the idea and operation of all material things——. With this account,

agrees the Spirit of prophecy. The Lord, saith he, *created* me in the beginning of his ways, for his works.”\*

If some parts of this be unintelligible, I hope the fault is not in the translator, who has endeavoured, as closely as possible, to follow his original. The Benedictine Editor, Roesler, Martini, Lindner, all complain of the obscurity of some of the phrases in the original. What concerns us, however, is sufficiently plain; at least, as it appears to me. The first born of God is not to be considered as *made*, like the creation, or other intelligences; for he existed eternally in God as his *vous και λογος*, understanding and reason. But he *came forth* (*προελθων*) to be the idea and operation, i. e. the deviser and maker, of all material things. In proof of this, the same passage is cited, from Proverbs 8 : 22, to which Justin appeals, for confirmation of his views; a passage which, supposing *wisdom* to mean the Logos, and that the Septuagint Version is correct, (as Justin, Athenagoras, and other Christian Fathers believed,) is well adapted to give countenance to their theory respecting the generation, or hypostatical origin of the Son.

Bishop Bull has made strenuous efforts, (Opp. pp. 203—208.) to vindicate the passage in question from the sense just given of it. But Petavius, Huet, and many

\* εστιν ο υιος του θεου λογος του πατρος εν ιδεα και ενεργεια, προς αυτου [αυτον] γασ, και δι' αυτου, παντα εγενετο, ενος οντος του πατρος και του υιου. Οντος δε του υιου εν πατρι, και πατρος εν υιω, ενοτητι και δυναμει πνευματος, vous και λογος του πατρος ο υιος του θεου — ο παις τι βουλευται, ερω δια βραχειων. Πρωτον γεννημα ειναι τω πατρι, ουχ ος γενομενον, (εξ αρχης γαρ ο θεος, vous αιδιος ων, ειχεν αυτος εν εαυτω τον λογον, αιδιως λογικος ων) αλλ' ος των υλικων ζυμπαντων — ιδεα και ενεργεια ειναι προελθων, κ. τ. λ. Athenag. Legatio, § 10. p. 236, 237.



others, who have maintained the doctrine of eternal generation, have accused Athenagoras of heresy, on account of the passage just quoted, because, as they aver, he plainly teaches that the generation of the Son was simply antemundane. The principal part of the Bishop's defence of Athenagoras' orthodoxy, rests on some hypercritical distinctions of a speculative and metaphysical nature, which he contends Athenagoras must have had in his mind. They amount to this. In every reasonable being who thinks, *mental* words are the necessary accompaniment of the act of thinking; i. e. they are, so to speak, the sons of the faculty of reason. *Words spoken* are only external copies of internal *mental words*. Like to this, is the origin of the Logos. He was from eternity the *mental word*, and therefore distinct from the *vous* which produced this word, (i. e. a separate hypostasis;) while, at the creation, he was revealed or made his appearance externally.

The theory is ingenious enough; and seems to have been first hit upon by Tertullian, in his book against Praxeas, chap. 5. But I am unable to find any support of it, in the passage of Athenagoras, under consideration. On the contrary, he expressly declares, that the Son of God is the *vous και λογος* of the Father; and that God being eternally *vous* had therefore the *λογος* in himself, who came forth, *προελθων*, at the formation of the world. Then he was the *ιδεα*, pattern, type, deviser of the creation; and the *ενεργεια*, operation, i. e. operating power which effected the work; for so, with the Benedictine editor, Roesler, Martini, and Muenscher, I believe this apparently obscure phrase is to be explained.

## TATIAN.

This father was an Assyrian by birth, and was devoted, in early life, to the study of the Greek philosophy. After becoming a convert to the Christian religion, he wrote his Address to the Greeks, about A. D. 172. From this work, the following passage is extracted.

“God was the beginning. By *αρχην* we understand the power of the Logos. For the Lord of the universe, being himself the substance of all things, whilst as yet nothing was created, *existed alone*. In so far as he possessed all power and was the substance, (*υποστασις*, the original cause or ground) of things visible and invisible, all things were with [in] him. With him, also, *by virtue of his rational power*, existed the Logos himself, *who was in him*. But *by his will, the Logos leaped forth from his simple being*; and not going into an empty sound, he became the first born work of the Father. This we know to be the beginning of the world. He became [the first born work] by communication, not by abscission; for what is abscinded, is separated from that whence it is abscinded. But that which is derived by communication——does not diminish that from which it is taken. From one torch we may light many torches, and still the light of the first torch is not diminished. So when the Logos proceeded [came forth] from the power of the Father, it did not deprive him who begat the Logos of reason. Even so, I speak and you hear me; and yet by the transition of my word to you, I who speak am not at all deprived of the faculty of reason.”\*

\* Θεος — κατα μεν μεθητοι γεγεννημενην ποιησιν μονος ην.

I have given as literal a translation as I was able to make. The necessity of all comment on this passage is superseded. The similies made use of show, beyond a doubt, that Tatian had uttered something respecting the rise of the Logos, which he supposed his readers would, without some explanation, view as interfering with the doctrine of the divine immutability. The existence of the Logos in God from eternity, his leaping forth, (*προπεδα*) by the *divine will*, and becoming the first born work of God, are drawn in colours so graphic, that all the zeal, ability, and learning of Bull (*Opera* pp. 209—213,) and the efforts of the Benedictine editor himself, have not been able to obscure the fact, that Tatian was no believer in the doctrine of eternal generation.

In confirmation of this, besides the passage itself, (the text of which the Benedictine has altered, without authority, and the translation of which Bishop Bull has accommodated to his own purposes,) the additional consideration may be stated, that Tatian was a disciple of Justin Martyr, and most probably agreed with his master. And Justin so clearly teaches the antemundane generation of the Son, that the Benedictine editor is candid enough to acknowledge it, in his notes to some of the passages above cited.

*Καθο δε πασα δυναμις, ορατων τε και αορατων αυτος υποστασις ην, συν αυτω τα παντα. Συν αυτω γαρ δια λογικης δυναμεως, αυτος και ο λογος, ος ην εν αυτω, υπεστησε. Θεληματι δε της απλοτητος αυτου προπηδα λογος. Ο δε λογος ου κατα κενου χωρησας εργον πρωτοτοκον του πατρος γινεται. Τουτον ισμεν του κοσμου την αρχην — ουτω και ο λογος προελθων εκ του πατρος δυναμεως, ουκ αλογον πεποιηκε τον γε γεννηοτα. κ. τ. λ. Tatiani Orat. contra Graecos, § 5. pp. 247, 248.*

## THEOPHILUS.

This writer was Bishop of Antioch, and wrote three books in defence of Christianity, which he addressed to one Autolycus. Shroeckh assigns these books to the period between A. D. 170 and 180; Wolf to 180—183.

The following passages relate to the subject in question.

“They, (the prophets) have harmoniously taught us, that God made all things out of nothing. For nothing is coeval with God. But he, being his own place, and in want of nothing, and existing before the worlds, was desirous to make man, by whom he might be known. For him he prepared the world. Now he who is created is exposed to want; but he, who is uncreated, needs nothing. God, then, having his Logos immanent in his own bowels, begat him with his own wisdom, emitting him (*εξερευξαμενος*) before all things. This Logos he had as an assistant in the work of creation, and by him he made all things, &c.”

——“And his Logos, who was always with him.”\*

Here, then, we have the doctrine of Justin brought forward in a form sufficiently repulsive. Theophilus is not content, like his predecessors, to represent the Logos as the immanent reason or understanding of the Deity; but he says, in somewhat offensive terms, that he was *ενδιαθετον εν τοις ιδιοις σπλαγχνοις*; and that at his birth, he

\* —— *εχων ουν ο θεος τον εαυτου λογον ενδιαθετον εν τοις ιδιοις σπλαγχνοις, εγεννησαν αυτον μετα της εαυτου σοφιας εξερευξαμενος προ των ολων. Τυτον τον λογον, κ. τ. λ. ——*

—— *Και ο λογος ο αγιος αυτου ο αιει συμπαρων αυτω. Ad Autolycum, Lib. II. § 10. p. 355.*



was ἐξερευξαμενον cast forth from his place, in order to assist in creating the world.

Even Bishop Bull's courage fails him here. "Fateor, τῷ λογῷ et Filio Dei generationem quandam a Theophilo tribui, quae creationem mundi paullo antecessit." But what kind of generation? Certainly not, he answers, of a person *who did not actually exist before*—but it was a generation *non veram ac propriam—sed figurate et metaphoricus sic dictam.* Opp. p. 215.

Is then, the generation of the Son of God a *proper* one? Has it any concern with sex? No, the Bishop would say; but there is a *real* procession or emanation from God the Father, as the original source of all Being. But this, I reply, is just what Theophilus asserts. The difference, however, between him and the Bishop is, that Theophilus asserts the generation or procession of the Son to have been merely antemundane; while his commentator asserts that it was from eternity.

That he declares the Logos to have been *always* with the Father is plain; and this is in perfect concord with Justin, Athenagoras, and Tatian. It is indeed a necessary consequence of his assertion, that the Logos was ἐνδιωθετον ἐν τοις σπλαγχνοις του πατρος. But the birth, the generation, the existence *ad extra*, or the hypostatical existence of the λογος, most undoubtedly is asserted to be only antemundane.

If, however, there be any doubt as to the opinion of Theophilus, another passage will serve to remove it. "God, the Father of the universe," says he, "is incomprehensible, and cannot be contained in any place.—But his Logos, by whom he made all things—assuming the person of the Father—came into paradise in his person, and conversed with Adam. For the holy Scrip-

ture teaches us, that Adam said he heard a voice. Now what else is a voice, but the Word of God, who is his Son; not as poets and mythologers speak of the sons of God, born from carnal intercourse; but, as truth declares, the Logos who was *always immanent* (*ενδιαθετον laid up, deposited*) in *the heart of God*. Before any thing was made, he had him for a counsellor, who was his understanding and his reason. But *when God desired to make what he had purposed to make, he begat this Logos produced*, (*προφορικον, apparent, prophoric*), the first born of all creation. Not that the Father deprived himself of reason; but having begotten the Logos, he converses always with his Logos, (or reason.) This, the holy Scriptures and all inspired men teach; of whom John says, In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God; shewing that, *at first, God was alone*, and his *Logos in him*. Afterwards he says, And the Logos was God. All things were made by him; and without him was nothing made. The Logos, therefore, being God, and *produced from God, when it seemed good to the Father of the universe*, he sends him to any particular place, &c.\*

\* Ὁ μὲν θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τῶν ὅλων ἀχώρητος ἐστὶ, καὶ ἐν τοῦ οὐκ εὗρισκεται — ὁ δὲ λόγος αὐτοῦ — ἀναλαμβάνων τὸ προσω-  
πον τοῦ πατρὸς — παρεγενετο εἰς τὸν Παραδεισον — ὅς ἐστι  
καὶ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, οὐκ ὡς οἱ ποιηταὶ — λεγουσιν — ἀλλὰ ὡς ἀλη-  
θεια διηγείται τὸν λόγον, τὸν ὄντα διαπαντός ενδιαθετον ἐν καρδία  
θεοῦ. Πρὸ γὰρ τι γινεσθαι, τούτου εἶχον συμβουλον, ἑαυτοῦ νοῦν  
καὶ φρονησιν ὄντα. Ὅποτε δὲ ἠθέλησεν ὁ θεὸς ποιῆσαι ὅσα ἐβου-  
λευσατο, τούτου τὸν λόγον ἐγεννήσεν προφορικον, πρωτοτοκον πάσης  
κτίσεως — — δεικνύς ὅτι ἐν πρώτοις μόνος ὁ θεὸς, καὶ ἐν αυ-  
τῷ ὁ λόγος — θεὸς οὐν ὢν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ἐκ θεοῦ πεφυκώς, ὅπου ἂν  
βουλεται ὁ πατὴρ τῶν ὅλων, κ. τ. λ. Ad. Autolycum, Lib. II. § 22.  
p. 365.

After the remarks which have been already made, further comment on this passage is unnecessary. The points in question—viz. *antemundane* and *voluntary generation*, (not that which is eternal and necessary,) are too plain not to be perceived, by every intelligent reader.

## IRENÆUS.

This writer was probably a native of Asia Minor; for as he himself informs us in his letter to Florinus, he was the disciple and friend of Polycarp. He came to Lyons, in France, where he was first a Presbyter under Photinus; whom as bishop, he succeeded, about A. D. 177. His work against the Gnostics, written originally in Greek, has come down to us, with the exception of the principal part of the first book, in a literal and barbarous Latin translation.

The controversy with the Gnostics, in which this father was so deeply engaged, naturally led him to reject with warmth the emanation-philosophy, which is the distinguishing trait of this sect.

In doing this, he manifests his disapprobation of any attempt to explain the generation of the Son, by such comparisons as were common, in the age when he lived. "God," says he, "being all mind and all Logos, what he thinks he speaks, and what he speaks he thinks. His thought is Logos; and his Logos, mind; and the Father himself is the Mind which comprises all. Whoever therefore speaks of the mind of God, as if externally produced, (*prolationem propriam menti donat*) makes him composite; as if God were one thing, and his essential mind another."

Shortly after, speaking of the production (prolationem) of the Logos, which the Gnostics maintained, he replies, "But the prophet says concerning him, Who shall declare his generation? But you, divining about his birth of the Father, and transferring the utterance of words by the human tongue to the Word of God, are justly detected by us, as not understanding either human or divine things."\*

In like manner he casts away the favorite comparison, drawn from the irradiation of light from the Sun. "If, says he, they (the Gnostics) speak of an emission [emanation] of God's understanding, they separate and divide the understanding of God. Where and whence did it emanate? Whatever emanates is received by something; but what was there more ancient than the mind of God, by which it could be received, when it was sent forth." He then goes on to state, that if the emission of the Logos be compared to the irradiation of light, which is received by the air that must exist antecedently to the irradiation; then the emission of the Logos would render necessary a subject to receive it, which is more ancient than itself.†

More fully still, does this father express his aversion to the belief of any emanation from God, in the following passage. "Since the Supreme God is all mind, and all Logos, as we have before said; and nothing in him is more ancient, or later, or anterior; but he remains entirely equal, and alike, and one; no emission of this nature can take place."‡

In chap. 23, Lib. II, he rejects the simile of one

\* Irenaeus in Biblioth. Patrum. Tom. II. P. II. c. 43. p. 210.

† Ibid. p. 256, Lib. II. c. 17.

‡ Ibid. c. 18. E. F.



torch kindling another without any diminution of its light, which was so often applied, by the early fathers, to explain the generation of the Son of God. Other passages of a similar nature might be produced; but these are sufficient to develope his opinions respecting these points.

After such declarations against the speculating philosophy of the age, we cannot expect to find this father explicitly avowing any theory about the doctrine of the generation of the Son. I have searched his writings in vain to find a direct avowal. There is no doubt of his belief in the proper divinity of Christ. He calls him "truly God and truly man;"\* true God;† God, and Lord, and eternal King;‡ &c. Nor is there any doubt of his belief in the eternity of the Son, considered as divine; for he speaks of the Son as *semper existens apud Patrem*;§ and often uses expressions respecting him equivalent to this. But the question still left unexplained is, did he believe in an eternal Logos *ενδιαθετος*, or in an eternally begotten, *prophoric* Logos or Son? The latter, says Bishop Bull, with the greatest confidence. But I am not able to satisfy myself that he has sufficient grounds for this confidence. Certainly there is nothing in the declaration that the Son is eternal, which will prove this; for so would Justin, and Athenagoras, and Tatian have spoken. But is he eternal as *immanent* or *prophoric*; as the reason or Logos of God internal, or as existing in a separate hypostasis? While the Bishop would assert the latter with confidence, I feel obliged to adopt the former as the more probable opinion of Irenaeus, for two reasons.

\* Ibid. Lib. IV. c. 14. D.

† Ibid. c. 22, ad finem.

‡ Ibid. Lib. III. c. 21. F.

§ Ibid. Lib. III. c. 20.

1. The current opinion of the fathers both before and after Irenaeus, was in unison with the former. *Cæteris paribus*, the probability is, that Irenaeus agreed with the general body of the Churches.

2. I have found one passage in this writer, which seems to me to recognize the common opinion of the fathers, about the *Logos immanent*. "The Word," says he, "glorified his Father, *dwelling in him* (*manens in eo abiding in him,*) not only before Adam, but before any order of beings."\*

What other meaning can we attach to *manens in eo*, except the one which is conveyed by *ενδιαθετος εν αυτω*? And though this is an expression overlooked by Muencher, and even by Martini; I cannot help thinking that it developes, in an indirect way, the real sentiments of this writer under examination.

I undertake not to say, that no other expressions of this writer can be found which may seem to indicate a different opinion, on the first examination. But with the fact in view, that the phrase Son of God is used as a proper name, and commuted by Irenaeus with the term *Logos*, I have found no real difficulty in the belief that the views of this Father are consistent with each other, and consistent with the common opinions of his age.

#### CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS.

flourished at Alexandria, first as a catechist, and then as a presbyter, near the close of the second Century. (Fl. A. D. 192, ob. circa 220.) His works still extant are

\* Ibid. Lib. IV. c. 28. ad init.

his *Address to the Heathen*, *Προτρεπτικός λογος*; his *Pedagogue*; and his *Σιρώματα* or *Miscellanies*.

Clemens speaks often and very copiously of the Logos; but in terms so loose and undefined, that hitherto all attempts to make a representation out of his writings, which would exhibit him as consistent in respect to his views of the person of Christ, or the subject of the Logos, have failed; at least, where impartiality has been shewn in the collection of testimonies from him. Martini, in his *History of the Doctrine of the Logos during the four first Centuries*, does not hesitate to say, that the representations of Clemens on this subject are irreconcilable. Of the same opinion is Münscher, in his *History of Christian Doctrine*; and Münter in his *Manual of the History of ancient Christian Doctrine*. With these excellent patristical critics agrees Roesler, in his *Bibliotheca of the Fathers*; a writer by no means inferior to any, who have appeared in the department of patristical lore.

A brief sketch of the grounds, on which such an opinion is built, may be found in the following passages.

“The image of God is his Logos; and the divine Logos is the genuine Son of understanding (*νου*), the original light of light.\*

Again; “Plato in his *Phaedrus*, speaking of truth, explains it as an *idea*. An idea is the thought [or conception] of the Divinity, which barbarians call the Logos of

\* — ἡ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰκὼν ὁ λογὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ υἱὸς τοῦ νοῦ γνησίος ὁ θεὸς λογὸς, φῶς ἀρχηγυπὸν φῶς. Cohort. ad Graec. c. 10. Sanct. Patt. Edit. Oberthür, Vol. IV. p. 157. If the reading *ἀρχηγυπὸν* be genuine, the meaning of Clemens doubtless is, that the Logos is the source of light to man, i. e. the original whence their light is derived. For Clemens immediately adds, “The image of the Logos is man; for there is a real *νοῦς* in man, who was formed in the image of God, &c.”

God. [By barbarians, he means the heathen Greeks.]  
 —The Logos *coming forth*, (*προελθων*) became the creator of the world. Afterwards, when the Logos became flesh he begat himself.\*

“There is one unbegotten Being, the Almighty God. And there is one begotten before all things, by whom all things were made. For Peter truly says,† there is one God, *who created the beginning* (*αρχην*) *of all things*; by which [*αρχην*] he means the *first begotten Son*, and he accurately understood the meaning of *Εν αρχη εποιησε ο θεος τον ουρανον και την γην*. This is he, who is called Wisdom by the prophets, the teacher of all creatures, the counsellor of God, who from ancient time, from the foundation of the world, at divers times and in various ways, instructed and perfected [men.]‡

In another place, he calls the Logos, *the first created wisdom*. Strom. Lib. V.

It is on account of these and such like passages in Clemens, that Martini, Münscher, and Münter all unite in declaring their entire conviction, that Clemens harmonized with Justin and other early fathers in the belief, that the Logos existed in God, as his reason or understanding from eternity, and that his generation was only antemundane. And yet, they all admit, that there are other passages, which seem to be at variance, (they hesitate not to say that they are at variance) with the opinion just advanced. Among such have been reckoned the following.

\* — *προελθων δε ο λογος, δημιουργιας αιτιος. επειτα και εαυτον γεννα, οταν ο λογος σαρξ εγενετο, κ. τ. λ.* Strom V. c. 2.

† The quotation by Clemens is from the *Κηρυγμα* of Peter, an apocryphal book, which Clemens quotes as genuine.

‡ Ibid. Strom. Lib. VI. c. 7. p. 242.



“The Logos of the Father is not *προφορικός*.”\* Whether he means to contradict the representation of Theophilus, who distinguished the Logos into *προφορικός* and *ενδιαθετός*, may perhaps be a question; but he appears to me to assert only that the simile drawn from a word, uttered by the human voice, is inadequate to describe the Logos; for as he proceeds to say, “He [the Logos] is the manifest wisdom and goodness of God, his omnipotent power, and truly divine;” i. e. he is not like an empty *prophoric* sound.

Again; he describes the Logos as omniscient and omnipresent; and as the most perfect, holy, and exalted nature, and who approximates the nearest to the only Almighty. Ibid. Vol. VI. p. 385.

In another passage, he calls the Son “the *older by birth* among intelligible things; the timeless beginning and firstling of beings, by whom we must learn the original cause; the father of all, the *most ancient* and most beneficent of all, &c.”†

Both opinions ascribed to Clemens, seemed to be comprized in this passage. In one moment, the Son is *πρεσβυτερον εν τοις νοητοις*; in the next he is *την αχρονον και αναρχον αρχην των οντων*. The solution of this apparent inconsistency lies, probably, within our reach. In respect to the generation of the Logos, he was *πρεσβυτερον εν γενεσει*; while in regard to his preceding existence, as the reason or understanding of God, he was *the timeless and beginningless* (pardon the word) *beginning, and original* of existences.

\* Ibid Strom. V. c. 1. Vol. IV. p. 12.

†— εν τοις νοητοις πρεσβυτερον εν γενεσει, την αχρονον και αναρχον αρχην τε και απαρχην των οντων, τον υιον, παρ’ ου εκμανθανειν το επεκεινα αιτιον, τον πατερα των ολων, το πρεσβιστον και παντων ευεργετικωτατον, &c. &c. Ibid. Strom. VII. c. 1. p. 380.

In his *Cohortatio ad Graecos*, he calls the Logos *aïdios*; and again he speaks of the *aïdios vïos*. But whether he used these words, with the intention only to convey the idea just expressed above, or whether he meant more by them, some may, no doubt, regard as uncertain.

For my own part, I feel that it would be a very difficult thing to make out and establish a definite statement of Clemens' opinion, on the point in question. He is so loose and declamatory a writer, that he seems to elude all effort to find any thing systematic and well defined, on points that are more nice and difficult. As it appears to me, the praise of *consistency* can hardly be given him, by a sober and impartial inquirer. And though the *predominant* evidence respecting his opinion appears to be in favour of the supposition that he believed in the simple antemundane generation of the Logos; yet the appeal cannot be made to him as a clear example of this view of the subject, with the same confidence that it may be made to some of the preceding Fathers, who have been quoted; or to some whose testimonies still remain to be recited.

#### TERTULLIAN.

This father was born at Carthage, about the middle of the second Century; educated as a heathen; and converted to Christianity, one knows not with certainty in what year. His writings were composed about the end of the second century and the beginning of the third.

Tertullian has left us no reason to doubt what his opinions were, in respect to the point in question. "God," says he, "before the creation, was alone, his own world and place; alone, because there was nothing extrinsic to

him. Yet not alone, for he had with him what he had in him, viz, his own reason. For God is a rational being, and his reason was in him first, and so all things were derived from him; which reason is his understanding. The Greeks call this *Logos*, and we, *Sermo*. On this account, we are accustomed, by merely interpreting the word [*Logos*,] to say, that *the Word was in the beginning with God*: when we should say, to speak correctly, Reason was first; for God from the beginning was not *sermonalis* but *rationalis*.”\*

Here is the existence of the *Logos* in his first state in God, as his reason or understanding. Next as to his generation.

“As soon as God had determined to bring into substance and form those things, which he had arranged within himself by his reason and his *Logos* (*Sermone*,) he *first produced the Word himself*, having in him his own reason and wisdom, that the universe might be made by him, &c.”†

Again; “*Then the Word himself assumed his form and beauty, sound and voice, when God said, Let*

\* — Caeterum ne tunc quidem solus; habebat enim secum, quam habebat in semetipso, rationem suam scilicet. Rationalis enim Deus, et ratio in ipso prius, et ita ab ipso omnia; quae ratio sensus ipsius est. Hunc Graeci *λογον* dicunt, quo vocabulo etiam sermonem appellamus. Ideoque in usu est jam nostrorum, per simplicitatem interpretationis, *Sermonem* dicere in primordio apud Deum fuisse; cum majus *rationem* competat, antiquiorem haberi; quia non *sermonalis* a principio, sed *rationalis* Deus, &c. Advers. Praxeam. c. 5.

† *Ut primum* Deus voluit ea, quae cum sophiae ratione et sermone disposuerat intra se, in substantias et species suas edere, *ipsum primum protulit Sermonem*, habentem in se individuas suas rationem et sophiam, ut per ipsum fierent universa, &c. Advers. Prax. c. 6.

there be light. This is the perfect nativity of the Word, when he proceeds from God, formed by him first mentally (*ad cogitatum*.) by the name of wisdom—*then generated in fact* (*ad effectum*.) &c.” By this procession became he the first born Son, before any thing else was born; and the only begotten.”\*

To answer the objections, which might be made against the generation of the Word when God said *Let there be light*, he soon after says; “But I reply, that nothing can proceed from God which is inane and void: so that what proceeded from him does not relate to any thing inane and void: nor could *that want substance, which proceeded from him*, who made so many substances, and is himself so great a substance.”†

In his piece against Hermogenes, who maintained the eternity of matter because, as he asserted, God had *always* been *Lord*, (and of course there must have *always* been something over which he exercised dominion,) Tertullian, after denying this, goes on to explain in the following words. “He (God) is not Father—*always*, because he is *always* God. For he could not be a Father before he had a Son; as there cannot be a judge, before there is a crime. There was a time, when the Son was not [as Son,]—who might make the Lord a father.”‡

\* *Tunc* igitur etiam ipse Sermo speciem et ornatum suum sumit, sonum et vocem, cum dicit Deus, *Fiat Lux*. Haec est nativitas perfecta Sermo, dum ex Deo procedit, coeditus ab eo primum ad cogitatum in nomine sapientiae—*dehinc generatus ad effectum*, &c. *Advers. Prax.* c. 7.

† — Caeterum vacuum nescio quid et inane et incorporale? At ego nihil dico de Deo inane et vacuum prodire potuisse, ut non de inani et vacuo prelatum; nec carere substantia, quod de tanta substantia processit, et tantas substantias fecit. *Advers. Prax.* c. 7.

‡ Non ideo pater—semper, quia Deus semper. Nam nec pater



Again ; “ Let Hermogenes acknowledge, that the Wisdom of God is spoken of as born and formed ; lest we should believe that any thing besides God only was unborn and unformed. For if within God, what was from him and in him, *was not without a beginning*, namely his Wisdom, *born and formed from the time when the mind of God began to be agitated about the formation of the world* ; much more must we deny that what was without God is eternal.”\*

Other passages might be adduced ; but it would be superfluous. It is impossible that Tertullian should be misunderstood, in regard to the point in question, however obscure some parts of his phraseology may be.

Compare now this father with the Greek writers, who have been quoted in the preceding pages, and he will be found to exceed them, in the repulsive style of his language, and (may I not add ?) gross materialism of his speculations. He even fixes upon the very moment when the Logos was generated. The voice of God, when he said *Let there be light*, was not a vacant empty sound, but became a hypostatical substantial being, the Son of God, and Creator of the world. No wonder Bishop Bull is greatly troubled to manage this Father ; as any one may see, who will read Bullii Opp. pp. 235—246. If he read with an impartial eye, he will be satisfied, I think, that Martini is guilty of no slander, when potuit esse ante filium ; nec iudex ante delictum.—*Fuit autem tempus cum et filius non fuit*—qui patrem Dominum (al. Deum) faceret. Contra Hermogenem, c. 3.

\* Si enim intra Dominum, quod ex ipso et in ipso fuit sine initio non fuit, sophia scilicet ejus exinde nata et condita, ex quo in sensu Dei ad opera mundi disponenda coepit agitari ; multo magis non capit, sine initio quicquam fuisse, quod extra Dominum fuerit. Contra Hermog. c. 18.

he says, "If any one is desirous to see how the most explicit assertions of a writer can be perverted by an erroneous explanation of particular words, by arbitrary interpolations, &c, let him read Bull;" [viz, on the two passages last quoted.]

### ORIGEN.

This father, who has so often been the subject of severe remark, by modern critics and divines, for his mystical exegesis and the extravagance of his theological opinions, was born at Alexandria, about A. D. 185. He yields to none of the fathers, except Jerome, in a knowledge of the Scriptures; and he has left very numerous writings behind him, most of which are in our hands.

No doubt can fairly be entertained, that Origen believed in the *eternal* generation of the Son. For the hypostatic existence of the Logos, he strongly contends; and as clearly declares, that he was Son from eternity.\*

He unequivocally rejects all similies, drawn from human generation or production;† and takes a decided stand against any application of the emanation-philosophy or the doctrine of emanation, prolation, or emission from God, to the explanation of this subject.‡ The immuta-

\* Vide apud Athanas. decret. Synod. Nicaen. § 27. Tom. I. p. 233, edit. Montfaucon. Also a quotation from Origen by Marcellus, (in Eusebius contra Marcell. l. c. 4. p. 22. edit. Paris. 1628,) in which passage he thus argues. "If God was always perfect, and had power to be a father, and it was good that he should be the father of such a Son; why did he put off and deprive himself of this good, and, as one may say, after that he could be the father of a Son, did not become so?" See also Comm. in Johann. pp. 49 and 50, also 33; and *Περί αρχων* Lib. I. c. 2. 3. IV. 23.

† *Περί αρχων*, Lib. IV. 28, and I. c. 2. 4.

‡ Ibid. I. c. 2. 6.

bility of the divine nature was a truth which he regarded with strong approbation; and every thing which seemed to interfere with it, he rejected. So great a change as the Deity must suffer, by the generation of a Son in time, appeared therefore irreconcilable with his views of the divine nature. And on the same general ground of reasoning, he maintained the eternity of the world. "As there cannot be," says he, "a Creator without a creation—those things made by God must necessarily have existed always, and there was no time when these things were not; for if there ever was a time when these things were not, then there was a time when there was no Maker, &c."\*

The gross material ideas conveyed by some words, which were used respecting the generation of the Son of God, and were common in the time of Origen, were very offensive to his ear. "Begotten of the being of the Father," was a phrase, which he could not tolerate at all. "Some," says he, understand the phrase, (John 8: 42,) *Εξηλθον απο του Θεου*, of the generation of the Son; from which, they say, it follows that the Son was *begotten from the being of the Father*.—It follows, that they must describe the Father and Son as corporeal, and that the Father is divided. These are the dogmas of men, who never even dreamed of an invisible and incorporeal nature."†

Origen himself, however, adopted a tenuous speculation, on the subject of the generation of the Son. He borrowed an intellectual or metaphysical similitude, to designate his view of it. "Sicut voluntas procedit e

\* Apud Methodium, in Photii Biblioth. cod. CCXXXV. p. 938. ed. Schott.

† Comm. in Johann. p. 306.

mente, (says he,)—so is the Son begotten of the Father.”\* So he compares the generation or rather the eternity of the generation of the Son, with the splendour that is coetaneous with light. †

In another place, he guards against any interference with the immutability of the Father, by representing the generation of the Son as *always continuing*. “The Father,” says he, “did not beget the Son, and dismiss (*απελυσεν*) him after his birth; but he *always* is begetting him.” ‡

It was Origen’s philosophy, therefore, which led him to embrace the doctrine of eternal generation; the same philosophy which led him to maintain the eternity of the world, or of the creation.

To defend the immutability of God he took the strange position, that a change in his relation in respect to dependent beings, necessarily implied a change in the creator and governor of them; or that all the relations implied by the names of God, which are found in the Bible, must have been eternal. That he embraced the doctrine of eternal generation, in consequence of being guided by such philosophy, will not serve much to recommend this doctrine to considerate inquirers of the present day.

#### DIONYSIUS,

Bishop of Alexandria a little after the middle of the 2nd Century, from his learning and fame was surnamed the Great. He has been claimed by both parties, the

\* *Περί αρχων*, Lib. I. c. 2. 6.

† *Ibid.* lib. IV. 28. Lib. I. c. 2. 4.

‡ *Comm. in Jerem. Homil. IX. Oberthür. Opp. Pat. T. XV. p. 478.*



orthodox, and the heterodox. Two quotations from him, as his sentiments are recorded by Athanasius, will suffice to exhibit his views.

“The Son of God is created and made——and as he is a created being, he existed not before he was made.”\*

Again: “God was not always Father; the Son was not always: but the supreme God was once without the Logos, and the Son was not, before he was begotten; for he is not eternal, but came into being afterwards.”†

I pass by this Father, without further remark; as his authority will not probably have much weight with sober inquirers; because his opinions are not very perfectly developed, nor his real character well ascertained.

Of Theognostus, a man of distinguished character at Alexandria, whom Athanasius calls *ανηρ λογιος — ο θαυμασιος και σπουδαιος*; of Pierius, a presbyter at Alexandria; of Gregory Thaumaturgus bishop of New Cæsarea in Pontus; all disciples of Origen, and all living in the latter part of the third century; I have been unable to trace any certain information, which would show what they held relative to the point under examination. In regard to Gregory Thaumaturgus, however, it should be mentioned, that if the Creed attributed to him by Gregory of Nyssa be genuine, there can be no doubt but that his belief comported altogether with the Athanasian Symbol. But there are strong reasons for believing that this creed is not the work of the bishop of Nova-

\* Apud Athanas. Expos. Fidei. p. 246.

† Apud Athanas. Expos. Fid. § 14, p. 253. Athanasius says that the Arians asserted these were the sentiments of Dionysius; but as he does not deny the truth of their allegation, it may be presumed to be correct.

Cæsarea ; although Bishop Bull has, without any hesitation, received it as genuine. I cannot stop here to repeat the reasons for my opinion on this point ; they may be found at large, in Martini's *Geschichte der Gotheit Christi*, pp. 232, 233.

#### LUCIAN,

A presbyter of Antioch, flourished at the close of the third Century. A creed is still extant, ascribed to him by a council assembled at Antioch in A. D. 341, in which he very fully ascribes divine attributes to Christ ; but in respect to the generation of the Son, he only asserts that he was γεννηθενια προ παντων των αιωνων *begotten before all ages*, [or worlds,] and that he was πρωτοτοκον πασης κτισσεως, *the first born of every creature*, [or of all creation.]\*

After this follows a formula of baptism ; and the whole closes with an anathema against those who maintain, that "there was a time, when the Son was not begotten ; or that the Son was a created being, like other created beings."

Both Arians and Athanasians have claimed the creed of Lucian, as favouring their sentiments. There is nothing in the expression *begotten before the ages*, or *the first born of every creature*, which Justin or Tatian, or Tertullian would have rejected ; and if the anathema be the work of Lucian, (more probably it belongs to the Council of Antioch, A. D. 341) still it may mean nothing more, than that the Son could not have been begotten

\* Soc. Hist. Eccles. Lib. II. c. 10. In Sozomen Ecc. Hist. Lib. III. c. V, it is said that the Council of Antioch ascribed this creed to Lucian, and declared that they found it in his hand-writing.

since time began. Bishop Bull himself has omitted Lucian, in his list of writers who testify in favour of eternal generation. Opp. pp. 200—203.

### METHODIUS

was bishop of Tyre about the end of the third Century. Only fragments of his works are preserved; and these principally by Photius, in his Bibliotheca. (Cod. 234—237.)

In his Treatise *Περί των γεννητων*, he says, “The beginning we must say, is the Father and Maker of all; from which sprung the most just Logos.”\*

In his Symposium, he call the Logos “the first begotten of God—who was before the ages,” [or *worlds*, or perhaps *Eons*.]†

In another passage, he speaks of him, as “the most exalted and ancient of the Eons, and the first [or head] of archangels.”‡

Yet this same Methodius, who speaks so exactly in the dialect of Justin, Athenagoras, and others of like sentiments, is cited by Bishop Bull, as clearly teaching the doctrine of eternal generation. “Methodius—*aeternam Filii ex Patre generationem, verbis veluti Solis radio descriptis, praedicat.*” Opp. p. 200. § 7.

What is the evidence? After quoting the passage

\* *Την μεν αρχην, αφ’ ης αναβλαστησεν ο ορθοτατος λογος, τον πατρηα και ποιητην των ολων γατεον.* Photii Biblioth. ed. Schott. p. 939.

† *Πρωτογονος του θεου—ο προ των αιωνων.* Sympos. p. 79. edit. Combefisii.

‡ — *ην γαρ προπεωδεσιατον τον πρεσβυτατον των αιωνων, και πρωτον των αρχαγγελων.* Ibid. Sympos. p. 79.

from the second Psalm, *Thou art my Son*, &c, Methodius adds ; “ We may observe, that the Son is here spoken of indefinitely and without limitation as to time ; For thou art my Son, said the Father to him, not Thou hast become so ; thus shewing that his filiation was not newly acquired, and also that he who before existed would not come to an end, but that he always is existent.\*

But how he found here the *verba veluti Solis radio descripta*, I am unable to say. I find no more than what Justin or Tertullian asserts ; viz, that his filiation was very ancient, i. e. antemundane ; and that he always existed, i. e. as Logos *ενδιαθετος*. The passage first cited shows, with much probability, that Methodius embraced the scheme of the innate Logos, and of his antemundane birth ; and if so, what he has said, in the passage cited by Dr. Bull, is easily explained, without any recurrence to the doctrine of eternal generation ; while on the other hand, all the quotations from him compared together, render it quite improbable that he embraced the opinion, which the Bishop ascribes to him.

Turning now to the Latin Church again, we light first upon

#### CYPRIAN,

A distinguished orator and bishop at Carthage, about the middle of the third Century. This father was much more engaged about practical piety than doctrinal knowledge ; and his works seldom present us with any close investigation. He calls the Word and Son of God, “ his power, his understanding, his wisdom, and his glory.”†

\* Photii Biblioth. Cod. 237.

† De Idolorum vanitate, p. 223. edit. Baluz.



The only passage, that I have been able to find, where is any direct intimation of Cyprian's opinion in respect to the generation of the Logos, is the application to him of a quotation out of Sirach 24 : 3 ; (which book he regarded as canonical.) He quotes it thus : " I came forth from the mouth of the most High, the first born before every creature."\*

The manner in which he has turned this passage, and the fact that he cherished a high respect for Tertullian, and a warm attachment to him, renders it not improbable, as Martini supposes, that he entertained sentiments similar with his.

#### ARNOBIUS,

Who wrote a little after the close of the third century, testifies abundantly to his belief that Christ is truly God ; but has no passage that I am able to find, where his opinion respecting the point in question is stated.

Passing now from the African Churches to the Italian, we find

#### NOVATIAN,

Who composed a treatise, about A. D. 256, against Sabellianism. Cyprian, who was very strongly opposed to him, in so far as he embraced the opinion that lapsed Christians were not to be readmitted to Christian communion, concedes, at least tacitly, that he was not heterodox, in his view, on the subject of the Trinity. (Epist.

\* Ego ex ore Altissimi prodii, primogenita ante omnem creaturam. Testim. adv. Jud. Lib. II. c. 1. In the Greek, the passage runs thus ; *Εγω απο στοματος υψιστου εξηλθον.*

76.) Sozomen testifies directly, that he was heretical only on the point already mentioned.\*

We may well suppose, then, that he has represented, in the Treatise just mentioned, the usual opinions of his time, among the Latin Churches. Let us hear him.

“God the Father—creator—unoriginated, invisible, immense, immortal, eternal, the only God—from whom, *when he pleased*, the Word his Son was born; which one must not understand of a sound from the percussion of the air, nor of a voice forced from the lungs, but of a power (*virtutis*) *substantially produced* from God—Therefore, *when the Father willed it*, he proceeded from the Father — who was in the Father, &c.”†

This is in entire accordance with Tertullian, and the earlier Greek Fathers already quoted.

Among the writers of the Italian Church,

#### LACTANTIUS

Is probably to be reckoned. It is a common opinion that he originated from Numidia; principally because Jerome asserts, that Arnobius was his teacher. But his Latin style seems strongly to vouch for it, that he was a native of Italy; for it is very refined, compared with that of the African writers. He was a teacher of rhetoric in Nicomedia, for a considerable part of his life; and in A. D. 314 or 315, was called by the emperor Constantine the Great, to be the tutor of his son Crispus.

Let us hear him, respecting the point in question.

\* Sozomen, Lib. VI. c. 24. *Νουατος — τους μεταμελομενους επι τοις αμαρτημασι εις κοινωνιαν ου προσιειτο. Και τουτο μονου εκαινοτομει.*

† Opp. edit. Rigalt. Cap. 31. p. 740.

——“In what manner did God procreate [the Son?] The divine work cannot be understood and fully explained by any one; but still, the holy Scriptures teach us, by admonishing us, that the Son of God is the *Word* of God, and that other angels are *spirits* [breaths.] For a *word* is breath uttered with a voice signifying something. But since a word and a breath are uttered through different organs, (e. g. the breath proceedst through the nostrils, and the word through the mouth,) there is, a great difference between the Son of God and the other angels. They proceeded from God as silent breaths; for they were not created to instruct, but to perform ministerial service. He, indeed, although a spirit too, *yet proceeded from the mouth of God, with a noise and sound*, i. e. as a *word*, for the reason he was about to use his voice in addressing the people, i. e. he was to be a teacher of divine doctrines. With propriety, therefore, he is called the Word of God, because God, by his indescribable power, formed into the image of his own majesty, the vocal spirit which proceeded from his mouth, who was conceived, not in the womb but in the mind, and who flourishes with his own understanding and wisdom, &c.”\*

\* Quomodo igitur procreavit?—illum Dei filium Dei esse sermonem, itemque caeteros angelos Dei spiritus esse. Nam sermo est spiritus cum voce aliquid significante prolatus. Sed tamen, quoniam spiritus et sermo diversis partibus proferuntur, (siquidem spiritus naribus, ore sermo procedit,) magna inter hunc Dei filium et caeteros angelos differentia est. Illi enim ex Deo taciti spiritus exierunt; quia non ad doctrinam Dei tradendam, sed ad ministerium creabantur. Ille vero, cum sit ipse spiritus, tamen *cum voce et sono ex Dei ore processit* sicut verbum, scilicet ea ratione, quia voce ejus ad populum fuerat usus, i. e. quod ille magister futurus esset doctrinae Dei, &c.” Institutt. IV. c. 8.

Who does not recognize in this, the grossness of Tertullian made still grosser? It is not enough to say, with Tertullian, that the Logos was produced in that moment, when God said *Let there be light*; but the fact that the breath of God was propelled from the mouth, in an audible word, instead of flowing silently through the nostrils, makes the difference in nature, between the Son and the angels.

In respect to *spiritual* ideas of the divine Being, we may well ask, How much had Lactantius advanced, by his profession of Christianity, beyond his previous heathen condition?

But I find myself already in the fourth century, and with unfeigned pleasure recur to my original design, to investigate the opinions of only the *early* fathers. Here then I stop; and here I will end this long letter, and tedious, but I hope not useless investigation, after two or three remarks.

I have forborne to recite the testimonies of

#### DIONYSIUS,

Bishop of Rome, A. D. 255—269; not because I intended to pass him by, but to continue unbroken the testimonies of those, who appeared to be of an opinion, similar to that of Justin and others before cited. I take this opportunity of saying, that Dionysius appears, from the fragment of his address to the Sabellians and their opponents in Africa, preserved by Athanasius,\* to have been very nearly, if not quite, of the same opinion with that expressed in the creed of the Council of Nice.

\* Athanas. de decret. Synod. Nic. § 26. Tom. I. p. 231. 332. edit. Benedict.



With the exception of this single father, I have not been able to find testimonies in any other early writer of eminence, in favour of the doctrine of eternal generation, as stated in the Nicene creed. Origen, and probably some of his immediate disciples, maintained this doctrine; but on different grounds from those of the Council of Nice. Their ground of argument was rather philosophical than Scriptural; believing that a generation in time, would detract from the immutability of the divine nature. The creed attributed to Lucian is indefinite; the anathema added at the close of the baptismal formula, somewhat uncertain in its origin. The genuineness of the creed attributed to Gregory Thaumaturgus, is very suspicious; altogether too much so to be relied on. Irenaeus, more scriptural and less tainted with philosophy than any of the early fathers, Greek or Roman, has forborne, in any special manner, to explain his views on the point in question, holding all speculations about it to be unlawful; although from one of his expressions, *it appears probable that he embraced the common doctrine.*

But waving all the difficulties which lie in the way of obtaining satisfactory evidence in favour of the doctrine of *eternal and necessary generation*, from the opinions of the fathers and creeds just named; and conceding that they are to be reckoned in favour of this doctrine; can I say with you, that “the early Christian writers *constantly* declared that it was firmly to be believed?” With the evidence before me, which the preceding pages develope, it is impossible for me to say this. I retire then from the investigation of the historical fact, which has thus far occupied me, with overwhelming doubts of the position which you have advanced in re-

gard to it; and sick, to the bottom of my heart, of all the philosophical speculations among the fathers, on the *manner* in which the distinctions or persons of the God-head are related to each other.

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### LETTER III.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

Having completed my investigation of the opinions of the early Fathers, I might now proceed to the scriptural investigation of the doctrine in question. But there is an inquiry which has occurred to my own mind, and which I presume will naturally occur to the mind of others, respecting the rise of the Nicene Creed, that ought not to be passed in silence. If the predominant opinion of the leading Fathers, in the second and third centuries, be such as has now been represented; how came it to pass, that a general Council of several hundred bishops, assembled at Nice in A. D. 325, should by an overwhelming majority adopt and sanction the doctrine of eternal generation?

A protracted and laboured answer to this question, would be out of place here. I shall only state in a few words, the views which, so far as I am acquainted with the subject, I have been led to entertain.

(1.) The Arian party had made a great schism in the church; and the natural consequence of the strong opposition to it, which arose from some of the most distinguished divines of that time, was a revolt to an opinion, which seemed to be very conspicuously oppo-

site. Arius maintained that Christ was a *created being* and *produced in time*. His opponents took opposite ground in both these respects; averring that he was *begotten* and *eternally begotten*.

(2.) The difficulties, which continually arose out of the opinions of Justin, Tertullian, and others of the same sentiments, became more and more palpable, as the church became more enlightened in respect to the true nature of the divine Being, and of the doctrines of the New Testament, and were farther removed from the religion and philosophy of the heathen. How the Logos could be God and yet be begotten in time, was a difficulty at which multitudes were stumbled; and if this were in truth conceded, the way to embrace Arianism seemed to be open, and accompanied with little difficulty. It was the natural effect of more enlightened ideas of the divine Nature, and of a wish to remove a stumbling block from the path of plain Christians, that the generation of the Son should come to be regarded as eternal.

The Nicene Creed is unquestionably a very great advance, in respect to rational views of God, upon the predominant speculations of the second and third Centuries, in regard to this subject. Whatever difficulties may attend it, I think no one, enlightened in regard to the spirituality and immutability of the divine Nature, can now hesitate to say, that it is incomparably preferable to the sentiments of most of the fathers whose views have been developed in the preceding pages. The Son, who is acknowledged as God, has divine honours and attributes ascribed to him. He differs from the Father, only in the fact that he is begotten, or derived from him; but still is represented as *always* coexistent

with him. To all who believe in the *true* divinity of Christ, this must appear incomparably more consistent than the doctrine of simple antemundane generation. And indeed, so satisfactory has this view been to the Church in general, that ever since the time of the council of Nice, with the exception of the occasional predominancy of Arianism, it has been acquiesced in by far the greater part of the Christian world. In respect to this fact, I have no doubt; and I most cheerfully concede it. I acknowledge that I feel strongly moved by its influence; and I hesitate whether it would not be adventurous, and whether it may not subject me to the imputation of hankering after new and paradoxical opinions, to endeavour to establish the correctness of a sentiment, which differs from that which has been so generally received. But of this more hereafter.

After all, the fact that the Nicene creed maintains the doctrine of eternal generation, cannot prove, by itself, that the leading fathers of the two preceding centuries actually maintained this sentiment. We know that the Church has changed its opinions on various points of religious doctrine, at different times, by the influence of popular and learned men, and powerful reasoners. The works of the Antenicene fathers must speak for themselves; and to them I have already made the appeal. Until the testimonies which have been adduced are shown to be irrelevant, or nugatory, whatever may be the difficulties of accounting for the sentiments of the Council of Nice, I must believe, that the Antenicene fathers, in general, did *not* maintain the doctrine of *eternal and necessary generation*.

Having expressed with so much freedom my views respecting the sentiments of most of the early fathers, I



cannot help feeling, that it would be doing those distinguished men (many of whom sealed with their blood the sincerity of their Christian profession) great injustice, to pass on without making some apology for them in respect to their opinions, and endeavouring to show how they were led to embrace them. This I will do, in as brief a manner as the nature of the case will permit.

1. Every man, in all his reasonings about psychological and metaphysical subjects, is influenced more or less by the current philosophy of the times in which he lives. In cases where he is no devotee to any system of philosophy, or not particularly given to the study of it, this influence, though insensible to him, is still very considerable. Who, for example, in the English world, is not influenced in whatever he says about the intellectual and metaphysical nature of man, by the philosophy of Locke, or Stewart, or Brown? And in all our final views of the nature and operations of the divine Being, are we not greatly influenced by the previous deductions of pure reason, in respect to his nature and attributes?

Such too was the case of the fathers, whose sentiments have been produced in the preceding pages. Most of them had been, in earlier life, Platonic philosophers; at least, they were adherents to the New Platonic School, which by a selection from various systems of philosophy, and a combination of them with some of the leading doctrines of Plato, had formed what is called Syncretism, i. e. mixed or eclectic Philosophy.

The charge has been often made against these fathers, of corrupting the Christian religion by the introduction of Platonic philosophy. They have had some learned vindicators also. Both sides have gone to ex-

tremes: as it often happens in disputes, not among the unlearned only, but among the learned; specially when men of ardent feelings become engaged in them. More recent, thorough, and impartial investigation has shewn, I believe to the general satisfaction of the learned, that the fathers cannot be justly charged with *designed* corruption of the doctrines of Christianity, in any respect, through the introduction of Platonic philosophy. The late Professor Keil, of Leipzick, has nearly put an end to this question.\*

But still, as the great body of the Antenicene fathers were attached to the Platonic philosophy, like all other men who reason on subjects where an appeal to philosophy is made, they were unquestionably influenced in their *modes of explanation*, by the philosophy which they had cultivated.

2. In answering the objections that are made to the system of religion which men embrace, an appeal is usually made to those arguments, which will put to silence the opponents of it; and of course, to those principles of philosophy or reasoning, which both parties hold in common. Even in silencing the speculative objections which arise in our minds, we appeal to principles of reasoning that have usually satisfied us; and when we have done this, it is common to rest contented with it, and to push our inquiries no farther.

Let us now go back, and place ourselves, if possible, in the condition of the Antenicene fathers. They lived at a time, when the doctrines of the New Platonic School had an almost universal influence, in all the countries where they resided. If now this philosophy admitted

\* Keil, de Doctoribus Vet. Eccles. culpa corruptae per Platonicas Sententias Theologiae liberandis Exercitationes.

and advocated a Logos, which emanated from God, was the creator of the world, and possessed divine attributes, nothing was more natural than to fall into the belief, that the same Logos was intended by John in his writings : although he was revealed by this apostle as they all believed, in a manner far more perfect than what was known to the philosophers ; and as clothed with attributes far more noble and exalted, than they in general assigned to him.

Plato himself often speaks of a *Logos* or *Nous*, to which he ascribes the creation of the world, and which he calls *ὁ παντῶν θεϊοτατος*, *the most divine of all things*. His poetic personifications of this Logos have been understood by many of his interpreters, both in ancient and modern times, as representations of a *real hypostasis*. But though more recent investigators have shewn that this is not his real meaning, but that he merely designs to personify the attributes of the Deity ; still, his language is such as might easily give rise to the belief, that he viewed the Logos as a real hypostasis. No wonder, then, that when the oriental emanation-philosophy came to be intermixed with his system, (as it did after the conquests of Alexander, and in consequence of the frequent intercourse that followed of the Greeks with the East,) that the New Platonics, or Eclectic philosophers should maintain the real personality of Plato's Logos. The Oriental philosophy inculcated, as a first principle, the doctrine of emanation from the Deity. God was represented as original light ; and from him, as beams from the Sun, flowed subordinate divinities or Eons, who created and governed the world. The Platonic school of Alexandria amalgamated this principle, in part, with their own philosophy. It is found most fully develop-

ed, in the works of Plotinus and Porphyry, New Platonics of the third century. But Numenius of Apamea, a Syrian by birth, who lived in the time of the Antonines, was undoubtedly a disciple of this school; which shows that the sentiments are of much earlier date than the time of Porphyry. Numenius speaks of a *second God*, whom he calls *λογος* and *δημιουργος*, and whom he represents as an emanation from the supreme God. And to prove that the supreme God suffered no change by such an emanation, he employs the very same metaphors or comparisons, that were so commonly employed by the Antenicene fathers. "A torch," says he, "still remains the same, although it kindles another torch. Instruction can pass from a teacher to his pupils, and yet the teacher suffer no change. So the *δημιουργος* could emanate from the supreme God, and yet the latter remain unchanged in his perfections."\*

There are abundant proofs, that this mode of representing the Logos as an emanation from God, was much older than Numenius; and that it was not by any means confined to heathen philosophers. The book of Wisdom, written before the Christian era, (which most of the Antenicene fathers received as canonical,) represents Wisdom or the Logos as the breath of the Almighty, an emanation of the Godhead, the pure radiance of the majesty of the Almighty, the irradiation of the eternal light, the spotless reflection of divine operating power, the image of the All-Good. By it is every thing created; it overlooks and penetrates through all things; it preserves and directs all things, in the best

\* Vide in Euseb. Praep. Evang. Lib. XI. c. 18; who has given a long extract from Numenius, that deserves to be read throughout.



manner. It knows the secret thoughts of God, and is the leader in all his works.\*

If here be not an absolute hypostasis of wisdom or the Logos, (as most of the learned have been inclined to believe,) there is certainly so close an approximation to it, that the fathers might easily mistake it for one, and apply it (as they did) to the explanation of the Logos of John.

But in a special manner, the writings of the celebrated Alexandrine philosopher, Philo Judaeus, a contemporary during the latter part of his life with the apostles, contributed to spread wide the speculations of the New Platonics about the Logos. Philo amalgamated the Jewish with the Platonic philosophy; so that being a writer more rational, Scriptural, and elevated in his moral and religious maxims, than the heathen philosophers, his works would necessarily be read with more avidity, by that class of the new Platonists, who admitted the authority of the Jewish Scriptures. Philo distinguishes between the *λογος ενδιαθειος* and *λογος προφορικος*;† the latter of which he represents as a being emanated or begotten, not uncreated like the great Supreme, nor created like other beings, but a medium between the two.‡ This Logos he calls first born Son,§ and represents all things as created, preserved and governed by him.|| This is he, who appeared to the patriarchs of the Old Testament; for the Supreme God,

\* Vid. Chapters VII. VIII. IX.

† De vita Mosis, III. 672. C. edit. Paris.

‡ Quis rer. div. haeres? Tom. IV. p. 90. edit. Pfeiffer.

§ De Agricult. Tom. III. p. 26. De Somn. Tom. V. p. 98. Vide Euseb. Evang. Praep. Lib. VII. c. 13.—extracts from Philo.

|| De Mundi Opific. Tom. II. p. 66. Ibid. p. 20. De Somn. Tom. V. p. 272.

who cannot be limited by any place, could not appear in a visible form.\* From this time the Logos became the advocate of men with God.† God sends him into virtuous souls, who are instructed by him.‡ He is the secondary God, who is subordinate to the Supreme.§

Here then, before the new Testament was written, we find nearly every speculation, which was adopted by the early fathers and applied to the Logos of the Evangelist John. The philosophy which presented these speculations, had a predominant overwhelming influence, in their times. Most of them had not only been disciples, but teachers of it. And besides this, it was the universal belief among speculating Christians of that period, that the Logos of whom John speaks was the very same spirit of wisdom, which operated partially in all the better part of the heathen philosophers, and that these had borrowed all their most valuable truths from the sacred writings of the Jews.

What now could be more natural, than for these fathers to apply the attributes of their philosophical Logos to the Logos of John? And specially so, when one and all agreed, that Wisdom, as described in the eighth chapter of Proverbs, must be the same as the Logos mentioned by the Evangelist. The predicates of wisdom, mentioned in this chapter, certainly bear a very strong resemblance to those ascribed to the Logos, by the book of Wisdom, and by Philo Judaeus in his works.

\* Legg. Allegor. Tom. I. p. 362, 363. De Somn. Tom. V. p. 30. 104.

† Quis rer. divin. haeres? Tom IV. p. 90.

‡ De Somn. Tom. V. p. 204. Comp. De Gigant. T. II. p. 366.

§ Legg. Allegor. T. I. p. 228. Ib. pp. 362, 363. Vide etiam in Euseb. Praep. Evang. Lib. VII. c. 13.

Specially is the resemblance strong, when the Septuagint Version is regarded as the true text of the Scriptures; and it is almost superfluous to say that this was the Bible of the Antenicene fathers, for none of them could read the *original text*, if Origen be excepted. Even his personal knowledge of the Hebrew is very questionable.

One remarkable mistake either in the original Version itself of the Septuagint, or in those MSS. which the fathers used, contributed greatly to encourage the speculations of the Antenicene fathers about the origin of the Logos (*προφορικος*.) Instead of translating as the Hebrew runs, "The Lord POSSESSED me in the beginning of his way," (*Κυριος εκησαστο με την αρχην της οδου αυτου,*) they read in their copies, "The Lord CREATED (*εκτισε*) me in the beginning of his ways."

Moreover, it is afterwards said, in the same chapter, (v. 25,) "Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, was *I brought forth*." The question does not seem even to have been debated, whether the Logos of John was actually the same as this Wisdom; or whether a mere poetic personification of Wisdom, and not a real hypostasis is meant; all taking it for granted, that the point admitted of no debate. What then could be more natural, than to apply the doctrines of the philosophy, which then prevailed so generally, to the explanation of the New Testament Logos; when they thought themselves fully authorized to do it, by the according voice of the Jewish Scriptures? It would have been next to miraculous, if they had not done so.

3. One other consideration should be stated. Most of the early fathers were employed, more or less, in defending Christianity against the attacks of heathen philoso-

phers, or in recommending it to the consideration of the heathen. The polytheistic philosophers were continually reproaching Christians, with reverencing and adoring only a crucified malefactor. The reply to this was very natural. "We adore no mere mortal. The Logos incarnate, is what we adore. The existence of this very Logos, your best philosophers and you yourselves admit. You cannot, therefore, reproach us with forming an imaginary being, whom we hold to be the object of religious reverence. On your own principles, our religion contains nothing that is absurd."

How natural and acceptable such a reply was to the fathers, may be easily understood from the nature of the case, and specially from the frequency with which it was used. Almost every man in vindicating his side of a disputed question, is satisfied if he can find arguments *pro re nata*. If they are effectual to silence his opponent, they must needs be a good kind of arguments. The fathers, in the full sincerity of their hearts, checked the contumelies of the heathen in such a way; and as they felt themselves to be building on the Jewish Scriptures, they hardly could have a suspicion, that there was any thing improper, in accepting all the aid which Platonism offered. Thus they at once stopped the mouths of gainsayers, and commended the religion which they had embraced to the heathen, who loved the study of philosophy.

4. One other suggestion must not be omitted. The great body of the Antenicene fathers were, in early life, educated as heathen. The genealogies of the gods had made a deep impression on their minds; and they were, before conversion to Christianity, at a great remove from rational and spiritual ideas of the divine nature. After



conversion, we cannot suppose that all the remains of their former notions and habits would at once be completely annihilated. Emanation or generation, applied to the divine nature, presented nothing revolting to them; as all their old habits of thinking had been in that way. Removing, then, from the generation of the Logos all that was carnal and corporeal, and understanding it only in a spiritual, mental, or metaphysical sense, there was nothing repulsive to their minds in it; even after they were taught by Christianity better views than they had formerly entertained, respecting the nature of the Divinity. Can we wonder at this, when we know how long the Apostles persisted in their Jewish notions about the temporal kingdom of the Messiah, and how far removed they were, for a long time, from admitting either the necessity or the possibility of his death?

Thus prepared by early education, by all the prejudices of youth, and by all the influence of philosophy to admit of *derived* Divinity, and to find it in the Logos, as the philosophers themselves had done; it would have been truly wonderful, if they had not been tinctured with the views which they did entertain. They did indeed believe that God was a Spirit. But a Spirit, in the view of that age, was far less removed from a corporeal being, than we are accustomed to believe. Let us hear Tertullian, for a moment on this subject. “*Quis negavit Deum corpus esse, etsi Deus spiritus est — spiritus enim corpus sui generis in sua effigie.\** In like manner he asserts that souls are corporeal.† The difference between spiritual and material beings, seems, in that age, to have been considered as rather *modal* than *essential*. Spirits were regarded as bodies impalpable to

\* Lib. advers. Prax. c. 7.      † De anima. c. 7.

corporeal view, and made up of infinitely attenuated particles of matter, too subtile to be detected by the senses.\*

With such views of the nature of God and of spirits, is it strange that they admitted the notions respecting the Logos, of which an account has been given in the preceding letter ?

We, who are taught from infancy to believe in the simplicity, spirituality, self-existence, independence, and immutability of the divine nature, can be brought only by violence to reason as the fathers did. Still this does not criminate them. With all our light and all our privileges, it is very doubtful whether we exhibit more of the Christian temper, and more devotedness to the service of the Redeemer, than they did.

It must be remembered, however, that the philosophical speculations of the fathers about the nature and origin of the Logos, or Son of God, never affected the mass of unlearned Christians. They continued in the more simple belief of Father, Son and Holy Ghost ; as all the popular Creeds, before the council of Nice, abundantly testify. It would be just as rational, to suppose that the metaphysical subtilities of the School-divines and of philosophizing theologians affect the great mass of the common people now, as that the subtilities of the Fathers affected the unlearned at that period. How often this obvious principle has been overlooked by modern disputants, must be evident to every one, who is well informed of the state of polemic theology.

A moderate acquaintance with the sacred exegesis

\* See Travels of younger Anacharsis, Part VII. note 1. Muen-scher, Dogmengeschichte, Th. I. S. 364, &c. Martini, Geschichte des Logos, S. 100.

of the early fathers will suffice to convince any one, that the sound principles of this art were very imperfectly understood by them. We need not be surprised, then, that they found the Logos of John, in the 8th chapter of Proverbs. At the present hour, after the lapse of more than fifteen centuries, and with all the advantages which commentaries and lexicons can now offer to the interpreters of Scriptures, there are multitudes of expositors, who still find the Logos in the same passage of Solomon's writings. Shall it be thought strange, then, that the Fathers did so; when it was in perfect consonance with the reigning philosophy of the age in which they lived?

Permit me, after thus endeavouring to show how we may account for it that the early fathers reasoned as they did about the Logos, to add a few remarks, on the abuse of their opinions; which has often happened among those, who have been more zealous to promote party sentiments, than to obtain simple views of truth.

It has often been said, that "any thing can be proved from the fathers." And this is really true, provided one may be permitted to use them in the way in which those have done, who *wished* to prove *any thing* from them. I could refer to Dr. Priestley's History of Corruptions as a striking example. There can be nothing more certain, than that the great body of the Fathers never dreamed of defending sentiments such as those of Priestley. And yet, with profound unacquaintance with the nature and spirit of the times in which the fathers lived, and of the exegesis which must be applied to them, he has contrived to make them say many things, which, he would fain have us believe, accord with his own views. I cannot do better justice to such an effort, than in the words of Dr. Muenschler, a consummate patristical scholar, and at

least, one whose testimony will not be thought to be warped by any attachment to orthodoxy. "A late work," says he, (*Dogmengeschichte*, Band 1. s. 80.) "wherein the celebrated Dissenter, J. Priestley, aimed to shew the corruptions of Christianity, has, through the fame of its author, excited greater attention than its *superficial contents*, and its *ignorance* of the sources of history, *which every where betrays itself*, deserve."

So judges one of the best patristical scholars now living, from a mere sense of literary justice. And so might he judge of many others, who have walked in Priestley's steps; and of not a few, who have been his opposers.

Nothing is more evident, than that to form a correct judgment of the language of the early fathers, we must have a good acquaintance with their modes of reasoning and philosophizing. Having most of them been educated with polytheistic notions, they did not take offence, as we now do, at many things, which evidently appear to us to detract from the spirituality and immutability of the divine nature. We should make these allowances when we read them; and making these, we shall be disposed to think more favourably of their real sentiments in respect to religion, than we otherwise could do. Of their sincere attachment to Christianity, the testimony is written in blood. That they worshipped the Saviour—that they paid him *religious homage*—that they, in general, regarded the Logos or divine nature in the Saviour, as having in some manner or other existed from all eternity—I cannot doubt. I say this, after repeated and somewhat extensive examination. But that they taught what agrees with the Scriptures, or with reason, respecting the *generation* of the Son of God, is what I do not believe; and cannot, until the whole ground of my present convictions is removed.



## LETTER IV.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

If possible, I now more than ever feel the truth of your just and truly Protestant sentiment, that "what is not found in Scripture, however extensively and unani- mously it may have been received by those who bore the Christian name, must be rejected, as forming no part of that precious system which God has revealed to man for his salvation." After passing through an investiga- tion, such as that which is exhibited in the two preced- ing letters, I cannot but feel gratitude to God, that he has ordered my existence in an age, when more scriptu- ral and rational views of his perfections are entertained, than were cherished by many of the distinguished writ- ers, which have been passed in review. Not that I undervalue them, or feel in any measure disposed to treat them with contumely, or even with indifference. But I do feel, that it is a privilege to know and believe more fully and clearly than they appear to have done, that "God is a spirit;" and that all his nature and attri- butes must be regarded in such a way, as never to ob- scure this plain and most interesting as well as awful truth.

But I have done with the fathers, and now proceed to the most important part of my object, viz, to inquire

First, *What is meant by the doctrine of eternal genera- tion?* And

Secondly, *Is this doctrine taught in the Scriptures?*

The present Letter will be devoted to the first of these questions.

You have not told us expressly what we are to understand by *eternal generation*. I cannot complain of this ; for you did not undertake, in your Letters, to theologize on this point. But there are two passages, which indirectly develope your conceptions, or at least your mode of expressing yourself, relative to the point in question. In p. 84, you say, " We find a certain *three-fold mode of existence* in the Deity, frequently referred to in the Scriptures, but not explained ;" and in p. 87, you ask," Where is the absurdity or contradiction of an *eternal or necessary emanation* from Him, (God the Father,) or if you please, an *eternal generation* ?"

The Scriptures then, as you aver, have left the three-fold mode of existence *unexplained*. May I be permitted to ask, now, if teaching the doctrine of the *eternal and necessary emanation or generation* of the Son of God, (whom as *Son* you view to be the second person in the Trinity,) be not attempting an explanation of a subject, which the sacred writers leave unexplained ? Is not existence or subsistence by *emanation*, a *mode* of existence ? And does not the original and *underived existence* of the Father, differ in *mode*, from the *emanative existence*, or *existence by generation* of the Son ?

It is not my design, however, to suggest difficulties in regard to particular positions which you have advanced. An examination of the subject itself, as it is developed in the leading orthodox writers, systematic and polemic, is my aim.

You will not understand me as engaging to pass in review, the great body of the theologians just named. This would be a task, tedious on account of the protract-

ed discussion which must necessarily ensue; and useless, because the leading writers have, for the most part, been the models of all the rest.

Turretine may be selected from the Reformed or Calvinistic churches, as a fair and very distinguished representative of them. His extensive knowledge, his ardent piety, and his unblemished reputation, have very justly given great influence to his character and writings. Let us hear him.

“This wonderful generation, [the eternal generation of the Son,] is rightly explained as a communication of essence from the Father, by which the Son possesses without division the *same essence with him*, and becomes most like to him.”\*

Again; “In that [generation] the *same numerical essence* is communicated, without abscission and without alienation.”†

Again; “In this, [the Father] generates within himself, and not without himself.”‡ And in the next section; “The Son is of the Father, but not posterior to the Father.”§

The generation of the Son, then, according to this celebrated divine, consists in the *eternal communication of the same numerical essence, without division or alienation*, (i. e. the *whole of the essence*, as it is very often expressed) *by the Father to the Son*.

\* *Generatio ista admirabilis recte exponitur, per communicationem essentiae a Patre, per quam eandem cum illo essentiam Filius indivisibiliter possidet, illi fit simillimus. Turret. Inst. Theol. p. 322. § 4. edit. Traj. ad Rhenum, 1734.*

† In ista [generatione] communicatur eadem numero essentia, sine abscissione et alienatione. Ibid.

‡ In ista [Pater] in se, sed non extra se generat. Ibid.

§ Filius est a Patre, sed non post Patrem. Ibid. § 5.

Some difficulties present themselves, in regard to this definition.

1. If the *same numerical essence* without division, is imparted by the Father to the Son, which he himself possesses, it follows, that the *essential power or virtue* of the Father, by which he produces or generates the Son, (a power which you, with Turretine, hold to be *necessarily not voluntarily* exercised,) must also be communicated to him; consequently, by virtue of this communication, the Son must produce another person of the same condition, or homoousian with him; this third person, a fourth; and so on, without end. If this be denied; then it follows, that one essential power or virtue of the Father is not communicated to the Son, viz, the power of *necessary eternal generation*. The definition, then, seems either to be inconsistent with itself, or to imply an infinite number of generations in the Godhead. In either case, it must be untenable.

I see no way of avoiding this conclusion, unless it be said, that Turretine has affirmed a communication of the *essence* of the Father to the Son, but not of his *attributes*. Should any one take refuge here, to defend the views of Turretine, he may be asked, What is known of the *essence* of God, when his *attributes* are subtracted? Did Turretine, or any one else, in reality ever attach any other idea to the term *divine essence*, than that which is the result of a union of those qualities, attributes, or predicates which are necessary to constitute the Godhead? Or did the Father communicate his *essence* to the Son, and not communicate his *attributes*? And if the generating power or attribute of the Father be, as Turretine and most who speculate with him maintain, *necessarily exercised*, it falls, of course, under the category of



the *essential predicates* of the Deity? Must the Father, in communicating his *whole essence* to the Son, communicate his *essential predicates*, or not? The answer to this question, leaves the definition of Turretine liable to all the objections that have been suggested.

2. The definition asserts, that the *same numerical essence* is communicated *to the same numerical essence*, (for Father and Son have, as Turretine avers, the same numerical essence;) which, after all the efforts I can make to understand it, is, as yet, absolutely unintelligible to me. To understand how the *same numerical essence* can be said to COMMUNICATE the *whole* of itself *to the same numerical essence*, I must give over in despair, to intellects of a different order from that which I possess.

To change the terms, and to say that the same numerical essence *generates* the same numerical essence; or *emanates* from it; is equally impossible for me to understand. I do not complain of it because the subject may be obscure, and above my comprehension as to the *manner* in which the communication may take place; but I complain that the proposition itself is, to my mind, unmeaning and unintelligible. I can easily admit, that while the numerical essence of the Godhead is one and the same, there may be a distinction in it, the nature of which is above my comprehension, (for numerical unity of essence by no means precludes the idea of distinction in some respects;) but that one distinction in the Godhead should *communicate the whole essence* of the Godhead to another, and yet *retain the whole*, without division and without alienation, if it be not a contradiction of terms, is, at least, a use of language, which I have no capacity to decipher.

If there be any intelligible meaning, which Turretine

designed to convey, I think it must be, that the Son is eternally derived from the Father in an inscrutable manner, while he is still of the same numerical essence with him. Of this general idea of *derived existence* or subsistence, in respect to the Son, I shall say more, in another place.

After all, Turretine limits the generation of the Son to the production of his *personality*, and does not extend it to his *essence*; "for this," says he, "would prepare the way for tritheism."\* This view of the subject, however, does not relieve the difficulties. Generation by the Father he has defined to be, *the communication of the same numerical essence which he possesses to the Son, and the communication of the whole of it without division*. But surely the *whole essence* of the Father does not consist merely in his *personality*. At any rate, Turretine himself has denied this; as he makes an important distinction, in the place just cited, between *person* and *essence*. How then can the generation of the Son consist in the communication of the *whole essence* of the Father to him; and yet the generation be limited to the production of *mere personality*? "Generatio," says he, "ut a persona fit originaliter, ita ad personam terminatur.† It would not be decorous in me to aver, that Turretine has "darkened words by counsel without knowledge." But if his words are really light, or have a meaning that is not contradictory, it must, I think, be a *transcendental* one, altogether too elevated for me to think of aspiring to reach it.

Turn we now from this excellent divine, (who generally shines with lustre not enfeebled because he now and then passes through an atmosphere somewhat nebu-

\* Ibid. § 6.

† Ibid.

lous,) to one of the noblest representatives of the Evangelical or Lutheran Churches ; I mean Gerhard, whose *Loci Theologici* are comprised in above twenty quarto volumes. In discussing the question *Whether the Father begat the Son of his own essence*, he has developed his view of the doctrine before us. "Observe," says he, "that the Father is said to have begotten the Son from his substance, not from any alienation or division of his essence ; (for neither did he deprive himself of his essence, nor give a part of it to the Son;) but by the *communication of his whole essence*, because by generation *he communicated his whole and perfect essence to the Son, and retained the whole of it to himself*, because it is infinite."\*

This definition agrees entirely, as to substance, with that of Turretine ; and therefore the same objections may be made to it. What idea can be conveyed to the human mind, by saying that the Father "*communicated his whole and perfect essence to the Son, and retained the whole of it to himself*," I am not competent to understand. I will not aver, that when the venerable author in question wrote this, he had no idea in his mind which he meant to communicate ; but I am obliged with pain to confess, that after repeated efforts to elicit an intelligible idea from his language, I have utterly failed to effect it.

Let us now come down to more recent divines, and select some of the most acute and metaphysical among them, who have been taught by the reiterated objections of opponents, to be much more cautious in their definitions than the older divines.

"Generation," says Brettschneider, "is that rela-

\* Gerhard, Tom. III. Loc. IV. Cap. V. § 75.

tion of the Father to the Son, by which the Father contains the reason of the subsistence (not the existence) of the Son.”\*

According to this definition, the Son *exists* of himself; but does not *subsist*, except by the Father. I have difficulties as great in understanding this definition, as that of Turretine or Gerhard. Of *subsistence*, I cannot form any definite idea, in reference to this subject, except that of *continued existence*. Are we then to understand, that the Son exists of himself or is self-existent, but continues to exist only by and through the Father? Can we form an idea of a *self-existent being, which continues to exist in and by another?*

But perhaps Brettschneider means, that the Son subsists as Son, i. e. his filiation, or hypostatical subsistence as Son, is only through or by the Father. If this be his meaning, there is yet so much obscurity, that I am not able to comprehend it. For the question is, What is generation, as applied to this subject? What is it which makes the Logos Son? If the answer be, It is that he derives his filiation from the Father; the question must still be put, Wherein does this filiation consist?—If the answer be, It consists in derivation from the Father; then we may still inquire, In *what respects* does derivation apply to the Logos? And to this question, Brettschneider has already answered, *In respect to subsistence*. This of course involves the difficulties already stated.

Let us hear the celebrated Reinhard, late court preacher of the king of Saxony, and an admirable scholar as well as very acute reasoner and theologian. “The Father generates the Son,” says he, “means that he is

\* Systemat. Entwicklung der Dogmatik, § 68.



in part the reason why divine perfections belong to him, in this rather than another manner.”\*

But if this be *generation*, may not the Son with equal propriety be said to generate the Father; since being co-equal and co-eternal, he cannot be conceived of without at the same time admitting the apprehension, that the perfections of the Father, all of which have so high a relation to him, are *modified* by him? And indeed, according to the definition just given, I am unable to perceive any analogy to the meaning of the word *generation*, in the connexion of the Son with the Father; or any propriety in using this word in preference to a multitude of others which might easily be selected.

Of the attempts of the early fathers to define what they meant by the generation of the Son of God, I have already taken sufficient notice. To the famous attempt in the Nicene Creed to make a standard definition, it is proper that I should now advert.

“We believe,” say the Nicene Fathers,—“in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance (*ουσιαν*) of the Father, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten not made, of the same substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, &c.”†

These accumulated expressions are not designed to be mere tautologies. They are all significant of sentiments opposed to various parties, (specially the Arian,) who denied the divinity, or distinct personality, or generated nature of the Son of God. The term *only begotten* they have attempted to explain, by adding that

\* Dogmatik, S. 151.

† Nicene Creed, in Bullii Opp. p. 5.

the Son is produced *from the substance of the Father*; and produced in such a way as to be God. *Light of light* only presents an image, by which they meant at once to defend and explain the assertion, *God of God*. It is as if they had said, The light which proceeds from the sun is of the same nature with the sun itself; and the procession of light is coeval with the existence of the sun. *Very God of very God*, is meant only to express their belief in the real divinity of the Son; for the Arians who did not at all scruple to call him God, would still deny that he was really and truly divine. *Begotten not made* was directly opposed to the Arians, who maintained that the Son was, properly speaking, a *created being*.

In the Nicene Creed, then, the generation of the Son is defined to be a production from the substance of the Father—an eternal production\*—while the Son, in all respects, except that of derivation, is represented as possessed of equality with the Father.

But this creed does not attempt to define, whether the production was voluntary or of necessity; and it cost Athanasius great exertions to procure a general admission of the idea, that the generation of the Son was *necessary*. It seemed to be a common apprehension, that this view of the subject limited the capacity or power of the Father.

It is disputed among the best patristical critics, whether numerical unity of essence belongs, according to the Nicene Creed, to the Father and the Son. Be

\* At the close of the Creed,—“And those who say, there was a time when he [the Son] was not, and before he was made he was not; or that he was made out of nothing, or out of any other hypostasis or substance, [than that of the Father]—the Catholic Church anathematizes.” Ibid.

this as it may, the distinguishing trait of filiation is represented by it, as *derivation from the substance of the Father*. I have reserved the examination of this generic idea, which lies at the basis of nearly all the definitions that have ever been given of eternal generation, for the subject of discussion in another letter.

I have referred back to the famous Nicene Creed, in the present Letter, merely to show, that however various the descriptions of the generation of the Son may have been, in some minute particulars, as given by those who hold that the Logos himself is the Son of God, yet there is a central point, in which they all meet; viz, *the Logos is derived (eternally derived, say most orthodox divines since the Council of Nice,) from the Father, and depends on him, as some say, for existence; others, for subsistence; the majority of later divines, for personality.*

Without occupying myself any longer then, by descending into the minutiae of differences in the modes of definition found in different writers, I will pass, at once, to the consideration of the main point which is common to them, viz, *that of derivation or dependence (in any respect whatever) as Logos, or a being truly divine.* This I shall endeavour to do, in the succeeding Letter.

## LETTER V.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

I begin the present Letter, by saying that I fully accede to your views respecting the unreasonableness of those, who demand that the *manner* of every fact which is affirmed should be explained, before they feel themselves obliged to believe the fact itself. I go so far here as to say, that a great part of all the facts with which we are acquainted, either in the natural or spiritual world, are of such a nature, that the *manner* in which they become facts, or exist as such, is utterly beyond the reach of our investigation. The manner in which a spire of grass grows, is as really beyond the reach of our knowledge, at present, as the sublime mysteries of the Godhead. The cry of *mystery, mystery*, which is so often raised against certain doctrines of the Scriptures, can never influence the real lover of truth to reject them. The fact that the doctrines are true is the only thing which claims his serious attention; the *manner* in which these truths come to exist, or continue to do so, is not what a rational philosopher expects to understand, in his present imperfect state.

But what is unintelligible or surpasses our comprehension, belongs to *things* and not to *words*. What we *express* respecting things, must of course be intelligible; for language is merely the vehicle by which our thoughts are conveyed to others. What we understand in our own minds, we can express to the minds of others; and what we do not understand, of course we cannot ex-



press, because our language, which is only the vehicle by which our thoughts are conveyed, cannot convey thoughts or conceptions which do not exist.

It is very easy then to draw the line of distinction, between mystery which is connected with *things* or phenomena, and mystery which belongs only to *language*. The latter, I take it, always proceeds either from want of skill, or crafty design, or an intention to speak enigmas.

We are not allowed, therefore, by the common laws of language, to assert any thing which, when examined, proves to be either a contradiction, or an incongruity; and then to take refuge from objections which may be made to our language, under the pretence that the subject is mysterious, and consequently it is improper to urge investigation respecting it. It may be true, indeed, that the subject of which we speak is mysterious. But what I have expressed about such a subject, if I have used language with any propriety, is, of course, only what I knew or conceived about it in my own mind. This can certainly be made intelligible to another mind; and there is, therefore, no mystery in my *expression*; at least there ought to be none.

The propriety of these distinctions will not, I apprehend, be called in question. Let me make the application to the subject before us.

If it be true, that the Logos is Son of God, (*de facto* not simply *de nomine*,) the manner of his generation may be, and no doubt is, inscrutable by us. I ask for no explanation of this. If *the fact can be proved*, those who believe it are not at all obliged to explain the manner in which it takes place. But if, in defining the *eternal generation* of the Son, divines have made statements, which are inconsistent with the perfections of God, or incon-

gruous, or injurious in their legitimate consequences to the proper divinity of the Logos ; then they cannot retreat from examination, and find shelter for such statements under the allegation, that the subject is *mysterious*. This may be very true ; but what they have stated concerning it is, or at least may be, no more mysterious to my mind than it was to theirs ; and consequently I may understand it. If they have stated something which they did not, and do not, and cannot know, a serious and rational man surely will not undertake to defend such a statement.

Is the *eternal generation* of the Son of God asserted in the Scriptures ? No direct assertion of this kind can be found. Those who believe the doctrine, deduce it *consequently* from certain passages of the Bible. Is this phraseology or doctrine any where *defined*, in the word of God ? No one will venture, at the present day, to assert this. We are cast, then, for the meaning of the terms in question, upon the definitions of divines, who have laboured to prove the doctrine. Those definitions have been produced ; and as they are not of inspired authority, it is doubtless lawful fully to examine them.

As I have already intimated, they all concur in the general idea of derivation and dependence, in some respect or other, of the Logos upon the Father. Is such an idea consistent with the truly divine nature of the Logos ? Is it consistent with the fundamental predicates of the divine Being ?

Bishop Bull, at the close of his work on the testimonies of the Antenicene fathers, has undertaken to show, that all who lived before the Council of Nice, as well as the members of that Council, and all the fathers who succeeded them, utterly disclaimed (*prorsus repugnare*)

the idea that the Son of God is *αυτοθεος* or self-existent. A second thesis advanced by him is, that “the ancient Fathers, with one voice, taught that God the Father is greater than the Son, inasmuch as [or because that] he is the origin and primary cause (principium) of him; but that still the Son, by nature (*κατα φύσιν*), is equal to the Father.”\*

The matter of fact, or in other words, that the class of fathers of whom he asserts this, did in reality believe and teach thus, I do not feel disposed to call in question. But whether the doctrine itself comports with the fundamental predicates of the Divinity, may be examined from the nature of the divine attributes, and from the Scriptures. With an examination of this doctrine, in respect to the nature of the divine attributes, the remainder of the present Letter is designed to be occupied.

That God is a being *self-existent, immutable, and independent*, is a truth conceded by all, who have any proper knowledge of the Deity, as revealed in his works and in his word. Nor is it the case that mere simple assent is given to these truths. They constitute the *basis*, the fundamental part of our notion of the Supreme Being. Self existence or uncaused existence is necessary to independence and immutability; nor is it possible for my mind to conceive of a being, who is in any sense dependent for any of his essential attributes or predicates on another, who is at the same time independent and immutable.

If then the Logos be dependent for existence, subsistence, or personality, on another, in that respect wherein he is dependent, he is not independent; nor, so far as his own power is concerned, can he be immutable; nor can he be *self-existent*.

\* Bullii Opp. p. 258.

Will any of the advocates of eternal generation say, that dependence for existence, or subsistence, or personality, is not dependence in respect to an *essential predicate* of the Logos? I think not. And if not, is not the Son, according to their mode of representation, wanting in an essential predicate of true and proper Divinity, viz, wanting in independence and self-existence as to an essential predicate or attribute?

For my own part, after the most anxious and painful scrutiny of this subject, I feel compelled to say, that self-existence, or uncaused existence, as to all essential predicates of Divinity, is fundamental, in my view of the Godhead. I can conceive it possible, that a derived being may have such an unlimited communication of power, and knowledge, and wisdom, that he may govern worlds; I say it may be *possible*, though I do not believe it actually to be the case. Such a being too may be perfectly just, and holy, and benevolent, and merciful. But a distinguishing mark, which of necessity would forever separate such being or beings from the Great Supreme, is found in *uncaused existence*. God has and can have no equal, no competitor, no representative, in this respect. He remains, and must eternally remain distinguished here, infinitely distinguished in the view of all rational beings, from every derived intelligence.

Any theory, then, respecting the person of the Son of God, which make the Logos a *derived being*, destroys the radical principle—an elementary ingredient, of his true and proper Divinity. I believe that the Logos is really and verily divine—self-existent, uncaused, independent, immutable in himself. *Derivation* in any shape, or in any measure; as to all or part of his essential predicates as God—whether you apply to it the name *generation*,



*emanation, creation, procession*, or any other term which has been used——*derivation*, I say, appears essentially incompatible with proper divinity. And so plain does this appear to my mind, that if I once admit the *proper derivation* of the Logos, (be the derivation eternal, or in time,) the idea of *supreme* Divinity vanishes in a moment ; and the Logos ranks with those who are *called God*, only from some resemblance either of station, or office, or of moral or intellectual qualities, to the self-existent Deity.

I have undertaken only to state my own views, and the reasons of them. If any of my brethren can relinquish the self-existence of the Logos, and yet hold the true and proper divinity of Christ, and worship him as very God, I can only say, that with all my heart I can give them the hand of a brother, as disciples of the same Saviour. But my mind utterly refuses, on this point, to speculate with them. God the maker of all things, has no *cause* of existence, i. e. no dependence for it, so far as I am able to learn any thing of his true nature.

If the question, whether this be a correct view of the nature of the Logos, is to be decided by patristical or ecclesiastical authority, or by the voice of the majority in times past, I frankly acknowledge that you will have an advantage over me. But you and I have renounced such authority, if it decides against reason and Scripture. I have made the appeal to reason, as concerned with deducing consistent conclusions from the nature of the divine attributes. I come now to the ultimate arbiter of all religious questions—to the Scriptures themselves.

## LETTER VI.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

It is very possible that you may think I have expressed myself too confidently, in the preceding letter, respecting the validity of the argument derived from the essential predicates of God, against the derivation of the Logos; and that you will say, I ought not to have attributed so much efficacy to an argument, that is not directly drawn from the express decisions of the Scriptures. I should feel the force of such an allegation, if the argument had been made out, without having first examined the Scriptures, to see if there were any thing there which would militate against it. This I did; and first satisfied my mind, that the sacred writers have not taught the generation or derivation of the Logos. In consequence of this, I felt more at liberty to argue in the manner I have done. A reader of my Letters might possibly think, that I first decided against the possibility of eternal generation, by reasoning independently of the Scriptures; and then brought this decision along with me, to the investigation of the Bible. This, however, I have not in fact done; nor, believing as I do that the Bible is the word of God, can I think it proper or lawful for me to do this. I would sooner distrust my own reasoning or deductions from what I believe to be the divine attributes, than distrust the decisions of the Scriptures on any point whatever, and specially on the awful mysteries of the Godhead.

I come now to develop the process of investigation, which has led me to a real belief, that the doctrine of eternal generation is not contained in the Scriptures.

The present Letter will be occupied with an investigation of the *usus loquendi*, in the Hebrew and its kindred languages, and also the Hebrew-Greek of the New Testament, with respect to the word *Son*.

It is sufficiently plain, that the great body of those, who have admitted the doctrine of eternal generation, have been more or less moved to do it, on account of the appellation *Son of God*, which is in a special sense given to Christ by the sacred writers.

Our first inquiry, then, is into the nature of Oriental or Shemitish usage, in regard to the term *Son*. When we have obtained general views of this usage, we may descend to particular investigations with much more advantage.

1. It is too obvious to need any proof, that the term *Son*, throughout the Scriptures Old and New, is employed, so often as is needed, in its primary and literal sense, viz, as designating the lineal descendent by corporeal generation of human parents. It designates, in this sense, not only the immediate descendent, as David the Son of Jesse ; but any descendent however remote. E. g. *the sons of Israel* may mean the Jews at any period ; and the *sons of Adam* the world of mankind, at any stage of their existence.

All other uses of the term *Son*, except the one just named, are of course figurative. And even the use of it to designate any but the *immediate* male progeny of human parents, is in a certain sense a figurative or secondary use of it.

The word *Son* was a favorite one among the Hebrews ;

and was employed by them, to designate a great variety of relations. The *son of any thing*, according to oriental idiom, may be either *what is closely connected with it, dependent on it, like it, the consequence of it, worthy of it, &c.* But this view of the subject must be explained, by actual examples from the Scriptures. The following I have selected from the Old and New Testaments.

*The son of eight days*, i. e. the child that is eight days old; *the son of one hundred years*, i. e. the person who is one hundred years of age; *the son of a year*, i. e. a yearling; *the son of my sorrow*, i. e. one who has caused me distress; *the son of my right hand*, i. e. one who will assist or be a help to me; *son of old age*, i. e. begotten in old age; *son of valour*, i. e. bold, brave; *son of Belial*, [lit. son of good-for-nothing.] i. e. a worthless man; *son of wickedness*, i. e. wicked; *son of a murderer*, i. e. a murderous person; *son of my vows*, i. e. son that answers to my vows; *son of death*, i. e. one who deserves death; *son of perdition*, i. e. one who deserves perdition; *son of smiting*, i. e. one who deserves stripes; *son of Gehenna*, i. e. one who deserves Gehenna; *son of consolation*, i. e. one fitted to administer consolation; *son of thunder*, i. e. a man of powerful, energetic eloquence or strength; *son of peace*, i. e. a peaceable man; *son of the morning*, i. e. morning star; *sons of the burning coal*, i. e. sparks of fire; *son of the bow*, i. e. an arrow; *son of the threshing floor*, i. e. grain; *son of oil*, i. e. fat; *son of the house*, i. e. domestic or slave; *son of man*, i. e. man, as it is usually applied; but perhaps in a sense somewhat diverse, in several respects, as applied to the Saviour.

Such is the wide extent of relation, similarity, connection, &c, which the term *son* is employed to designate in the Hebrew, and in the Hebrew idiom of the New Testament; a latitude far greater than is given to it in the



Occidental languages; and which no one, who is not conversant with the Hebrew, can scarcely estimate in an adequate manner.

In collecting and translating these idioms, I have, of course, followed the phraseology of the original languages to which they belong, and not our English Version; which not unfrequently paraphrases them, in order to render them intelligible to the English reader.

Nor are the Hebrew of the Jewish Scriptures and Hebrew-Greek of the New Testament, the only languages which exhibit this latitude of construction in respect to the word *son*. The same idiom runs through all the Shemitish languages. In the Syriac Version of the Scriptures, made, as is most probable, not long after the death of the Apostles, and in a language which approximates nearest of all to the vernacular dialect of the Jews in our Saviour's time, the word in question is used in a still greater latitude. The following instances are collected from this Version.

*A son of trade*, i. e. ὁμοτεχνος, or one of the same trade, fellow workman; *son of a great family*, i. e. a nobleman; *son of my yoke*, i. e. my companion; *son of foster-fathers*, i. e. συρισσοφος, an associate in education or pupilage; *son of flesh*, i. e. a relative; *son of adultery*, i. e. a person of illegitimate birth; *son of his day*, i. e. a cotemporary; *son of his hour*, i. e. forthwith, immediately; *son of the neck*, i. e. a collet; *sons of inheritance*, i. e. heirs; *sons of the place*, i. e. dwelling together; *sons of the city*, i. e. fellow citizens; *sons of the tribe*, i. e. members of the same tribe; *sons of the people*, i. e. Gentiles; *sons of the company*, i. e. fellow travellers; *sons of my years*, i. e. my equals in age; *sons of the nobles*, i. e. free-men; *sons of Crete*, i. e. Cretans; *sons of idols*, i. e. idolaters.

To these idioms, taken from the Syriac Version of the

Scriptures, may be added others belonging to the language ; e. g. *the son of secrecy*, i. e. privy counsellor ; *son of the oaks*, i. e. of noble progeny ; *the son of similitude*, i. e. most like ; *son of heresy*, i. e. a heretic ; *son of nature*, i. e. of the same nature ; *a son of two portions*, i. e. one who receives a double portion of inheritance ; *son of the leopards*, i. e. Bacchus ; *son of dividing*, i. e. one who divides the inheritance with another ; *son of the month*, i. e. of the same month ; *son of the year*, i. e. a cotemporary ; *son of opinion*, i. e. one holding the same sentiments.

Besides these, most of the instances already adduced above from the Hebrew idiom, are found in the Syriac ; together with other cases of a similar kind, which I forbear to cite.

In the Arabic language, the idiom in question is still *more* striking ; because we have the language in much fuller extent than either the Syriac or the Hebrew. Here we find, besides many of the idioms already quoted, *sons of the land*, i. e. strangers ; *son of familiarity*, i. e. intimate friend ; *son of moonshine*, i. e. a night resplendent with moon-beams ; *son of the night*, i. e. a dark night ; *son of misfortune*, i. e. in trouble ; *son of the days*, i. e. unfortunate ; *son of destroying*, i. e. warlike ; *son of freedom*, i. e. innocent ; *son of the way*, i. e. a traveller ; *son of the sun*, i. e. Aurora, or morning light ; *son of the clouds*, i. e. rain, also, coolness ; *son of time*, i. e. a day and a night ; *son of the night*, i. e. the moon ; *son of the day*, i. e. a day.

These are only a part of the instances which occur, of the idiomatic use of the word *son* in Arabic. More might easily be added ; but I deem it unnecessary.

The object of all the specimens which I have exhib-

ited of the use of the term *son*, in the Shemitish languages, is to make it evident how very vague, indefinite, and extensive, the secondary significations of this word are; and how different the genius of the oriental languages, which thus employ it, is, from that of our own language, or from those of Europe in general.

Every kind of relation or resemblance whether real or imaginary, every kind of connexion, is characterised by calling it the *son* of that thing to which it stands thus related, or with which it is connected.

Very different is the genius of the western languages. We have, indeed, borrowed from the Scriptures many expressions, where *son* is employed in a manner agreeable to their idiom; and from poetry—from Homer (himself probably an Asiatic,) we have borrowed many more which resemble them. But our own language, in itself and apart from these sources of expression, is barren in respect to the idiom in question. And such is the general fact, in regard to all the occidental languages, ancient and modern.

It is obvious, now, that there would naturally be a great tendency in occidental readers, to understand the word *son* in a literal sense, or in a sense as near as possible to a literal one, wherever they found it employed. I have little doubt that the emphasis placed by many divines, in ancient and modern times, on the phrase *son of God*, as a proof of the generation or derivation of the Logos, has been owing, *in part*, to this difference of idiom between the East and West. It has operated insensibly, but not with the less certainty or effect, on that account.

It will be remembered, however, that when we investigate the meaning of the phrase *Son of God*, in the

Scriptures, we are investigating the *usus loquendi* of a *Shemitish dialect*. This will of course be conceded, in regard to the phrase in the Old Testament ; and I may add, that all critics are now agreed, that although the *words* of the New Testament are Greek, the *idiom* is Hebrew.

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## LETTER VII.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

Almost any one who is conversant with the study of languages, would expect, from the *usus loquendi* of the Hebrew as already exhibited in respect to the word *son*, that the phrase *son or sons of God*, would be employed with considerable variety and latitude of meaning. It is the object of the present letter, to investigate the various senses in which this phrase is employed by the sacred writers.

To begin with the Old Testament. I find the phrase *son of God*, in the singular number, and in this form, only once in the Hebrew Scriptures ; and this instance is in Daniel 3: 25. Nebuchadnezzar sees four men loose, in the fiery furnace, and the form of the fourth, he says, is like a *son of God or the gods*, i. e. like a supernatural being, angel or spirit, viz, resplendent, majestic. The rendering of our Version, *the Son of God*, obscures the sense, and, as I must think, misleads the common reader. It conveys a meaning entirely destitute of probability ; for the words were uttered by an idolatrous hea-



then prince, who does not seem to have had, at least as yet, any knowledge of *the Son of God*.

In the plural number, used as a generic noun to designate the pious, *sons of God* is probably employed in Gen. 6: 2 and 4; *The sons of God saw the daughters of men, &c.* To apply the phrase here, as most of the ancient fathers did, to the angels, seems sufficiently absurd; and to apply it, as the Targum of Onkelos and many translators and commentators after it have done, to the sons of princes or noblemen (בְּנֵי רִבְרִיָא), seems to be very unsatisfactory; for why should the mixture of noblemen and common people occasion all that excess of wickedness, which followed the intercourse spoken of in the text? I must believe that here, then, for the first time in the Scriptures, *sons of God* is used to describe those, who professed to be pious or the children of God.

In Job 1: 6, and 2: 1, *sons of God* seems to mean *angels*; for the congruity of the representation is destroyed, unless we suppose, that those with whom Satan came to present himself, were of the same order of beings with him.

In Job 38: 7, *When all sons of God shouted for joy*, is probably descriptive of the angels; so that the *usus loquendi* of this book is uniform, in respect to the meaning of the phrase.

Hosea 1: 10, "In the place where it was said unto them, [the children of Israel] ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, *Ye are the sons of the living God.*" This is a clear case, again, of the use of the phrase to designate the *pious*.

In a similar way, God confers on the whole nation of Israel, who were his chosen people, and professed to

love and serve him, the title *Son*. Hosea 11: 1, When Israel was a child I loved him ; *and called my son out of Egypt*. Exod. 4: 22, and 23, Thus saith the Lord, *Israel is my son, even my first born*. St. Paul, probably in allusion to this passage, speaks of the *adoption* of the Israelitish nation, as one of their privileges, in Rom. 9: 4. In Deut. 4: 1, it is said of Israel, *Ye are the children of Jehovah*.

In Ps. 82: 6, princes or magistrates are called בְּנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן *sons of the most high*, υἱοὶ ὑψίστου. The same designation, in the *singular* number, is applied by the angel Gabriel to the Saviour, who was to be born of the virgin Mary ; Luke 1: 32.

In the New Testament, the phrase *sons of God* is so often applied to Christians, or pious persons, that it would be a waste of time to repeat all the instances in which this phraseology occurs. Peacemakers are called the sons of God, and the sons of the most high ; those who bless their persecutors are sons of their heavenly Father ; the good seed are the sons of the Kingdom ; saints at the resurrection are the sons of God, and the sons of the resurrection ; as many as are led by the spirit of God are the sons of God ; those who are born in a spiritual manner have the privilege of being the sons of God ; God will be a Father to Christians, and they shall be the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty ; those who have faith in Christ Jesus are the sons of God ; Christians are exhorted to be harmless, that they may be the sons of God without rebuke ; the Father's great love has made Christians the sons of God ; they are now the sons of God, but will be advanced in holiness and happiness hereafter.

It should be remembered here, (what however I have

not found remarked in any of the Lexicons or Commentaries which I have consulted,) that the phrase is never used in the singular number and applied in this way to designate an individual saint. When God calls Israel his Son and his first born, (in Ex. 4: 22, 23, and Hosea 11: 1,) the singular number is plainly generic, or a noun of multitude; just as the name Israel or Judah commonly is. It is rather remarkable, that in both the Old and New Testament, this usage should reign without exception. At least, after diligent investigation, I have not been able to find an exception, *when it is applied simply to designate the character of a saint, or a professed disciple of Judaism or Christianity.* *Man of God* we find applied to designate a prophet, and perhaps a pious man simply; but *child of God*, or *son of God*, in the singular number, and with a singular sense, is applied by the sacred writers themselves, only to Christ; with the exception of a single instance, which I shall soon notice. And this appellation we find given to him, both in prophecy and in history.

The exception to which I have just referred, is found in Luke 3: 38; which contains the genealogy of Jesus traced back to Adam, who is called *the son of God*. The obvious reason of the appellation here, is the immediate derivation of Adam from the creative power of his Maker.

In a sense kindred to this, all men are sometimes represented as standing in the relation of children to God, both in the Old and New Testaments.

In respect to the *pious*, God is styled *their father* on a double account; viz, as the author of their being, or as Paul calls him in Heb. 12: 9, *the Father of spirits*; and because they stand in a spiritual relation to him, in which

they are named and treated as children. Thus our Saviour has taught Christians, when praying, to say, *Our Father*. But instances of this usage are so common, and so universally acknowledged, that detailed proof is unnecessary.

In cases, however, where the *rebellious* Israelites and the heathen are spoken of, God is styled *their father*, because that he is the author of their being. Thus Moses, predicting the future corruption and perverseness of Israel breaks out into remonstrance with them; “Do ye thus requite the Lord? O foolish people and unwise! Is he not *thy father*, that redeemed thee [from Egypt?] Hath he not *made thee*?” Deut. 32: 6. So the prophet, pleading with God for *apostate* Israel, says; “But now, O Lord, thou art *our Father*; we are the clay, and thou our Potter; and we are all the work of thine hand.” Isaiah 64: 8. So Malachi expostulates with the wicked priests of his time, in behalf of God; “If I be a *father*, where is mine honour?” And in the same manner, rebellious and apostate men, under the image of the prodigal son, are represented as wandering from their *Father’s house*; and when penitent, they are permitted to come and say, “*Father*, we have sinned.”

The apostle represents God as sustaining the same relation to the Gentiles, as their maker and preserver, which he sustained toward the Jews. “Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not of the Gentiles also? Yes, of the Gentiles also.” Rom. 3: 29. And as he has made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined—the bounds of their habitations; so all “live and move and have their being” in him, “and—are also his offspring.” Acts 17: 26, 28.



In other senses than those now exhibited, I find not the term *son of God* applied in the Scriptures; with the exception of its meaning when applied to the Saviour, and which will be the subject of inquiry in the succeeding Letter.

Let us now take a summary view of the various meanings of the phrase in question.

(1.) *Sons of God* means the pious, or those who profess to love and obey God. (2.) It means angels, or supernatural spiritual beings. (3) It means kings, and perhaps their vicegerents i. e. magistrates. (4.) It designates the relation in which all men stand to God, as the author of their being.

The reason of the appellation in this last case is so obvious, and the analogy which leads to it so plain and striking, that it is unnecessary to say more than has been already said, to illustrate the ground of it. But it may not be useless to add a few remarks, which may serve to explain the grounds of this appellation, in the three first of the cases just mentioned; for as all the uses of it just exhibited, are of a figurative or secondary nature, so the ground of such usage, it is probable, may be satisfactorily traced.

*Sons of God*, as a designation of the pious, may easily be explained. The Hebrew idiom calls him the son of any person or thing, who exhibits a resemblance in disposition or character. Thus our Saviour says to the malignant and persecuting Jews, who assailed him, "Ye are of your father, the devil, and ye are desirous to accomplish his wishes." So in the first Epistle of John; "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest. Every one who doeth not righteousness is not of God, &c." Agreeably to this idiom, our Saviour says to

the Jews, "If ye were the sons of Abraham, ye would do the works of Abraham."

In like manner, in the sermon on the mount, Christ exhorts his disciples to show benevolence towards their enemies and persecutors, that they might be the *children of their Father in heaven*, who dispenses his blessings to the just and the unjust; i. e. that they might be *imitators* of his conduct.

Another reason why the pious are called *sons of God*, is, that they receive divine instruction, or are his disciples. In conformity with this idiom, Paul says to the Corinthians, "Ye have not many *fathers*, for in Christ Jesus *I have begotten you through the gospel*."

"Those who are of God," says the Saviour, "hear the words of God;" i. e. those who are his children, listen to his instructions.

A third reason seems to be exhibited in Rom. 8: 17. "For if we are *children*, then are we heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." The "inheritance of the saints in light" is an expression, founded on the recognition of their character as children.

Lastly, Christians are said to be *born of God*, on account of the regenerating influences of his Spirit on their souls. Is it any wonder, then, that they are called the sons or children of God?

Uniting all these reasons, it is very easy to perceive how natural it was for Hebrew writers to designate the pious, by the title *sons of God*.

The application of the phrase to designate angels, is also easily to be accounted for. Angels are the ministers and vicegerents of the Deity, to execute his will. They are of a rank elevated far above men, in their present state; and their appearance to men, in ancient

times, was, no doubt, attended with striking indications of splendour and glory. To call them *sons of God*, as special representatives of the Deity, and bearing a high resemblance in holiness to him, was very natural to a Hebrew.

Finally, that kings and superior magistrates should be called the sons of God, or the sons of the most High, can create no wonder in the mind of any one, who has attended to the *usus loquendi* of the word *son*. The idea of a king or chief magistrate in the East was, and still is, very different from that which we form in a land of Christian freedom. Prostration in the dust before kings and nobles, is the common token of respect paid by all inferiors. The subject feels that there is an immeasurable distance between him and his prince. Hence the highest titles of honor and reverence are applied to him. *Sons of the most high*, spoken by a Hebrew to designate princes, would mean *elevated to the highest dignity, controlling with absolute sway*; and thus bearing a resemblance to God, in respect to the dominion which he exercises as Lord of the Universe. It is on this same ground, that the Hebrew Scriptures call kings or princes, *gods*, (אלהים); a title perhaps of a still higher nature, than *sons of God*; but perfectly in accordance with the oriental views of the station and majesty of an absolute monarch. Being once applied to such a personage, it would naturally pass to his vicegerents; and so we find it used by the Hebrew writers.

In my investigations, thus far, I have foreborne to touch upon the phrase *son of God* as applied to Christ. We are prepared for a proper investigation of this subject, only when we come to it with correct general views of the latitude and peculiarities of the phrase in

question, as exhibited by the sacred writers. The way I trust, is now prepared, to proceed with the hope of acquiring satisfaction respecting the great question; What idea do the sacred writers attach to the phrase *Son of God*, as applied to Christ? But the investigation of this must be reserved for another Letter.

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## LETTER VIII.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

After the investigation of the preceding Letter, I think it can easily be made to appear, that the name *Son of God* has, in some respects, a speciality of meaning when applied to the Saviour. We have seen that it is only the plural word *sons*, or the singular used as a collective noun, which is applied to designate believers; and that it is said of no believer, *individually considered merely as a believer*, that he is the *son of God*.

I cannot help remarking here, that the same is the case, in regard to magistrates or princes. It is collectively, or as a body, that they are called אֱלֹהִים *gods*; and no single magistrate is ever saluted with this appellation. The case where it is said of Moses that he should be made a god to Pharaoh, is no exception to this remark; as the sense plainly amounts to no more, than that Pharaoh should be submitted to the controul or disposal of Moses, while acting as the ambassador of God. The case which occurs in the forty fifth Psalm, is not one in point to disprove what I have alleged; as the



Apostle has told us this compellation is addressed to the Son of God, i. e. Christ.

But to return, I find no case, where the term *Son of God* appears to be applied to Christ, simply on the ground of his *moral* resemblance to the Father. And though he often speaks of himself as having been instructed by the Father; yet I am unable to find any passage, in which the appellation of *Son* is represented as bestowed upon him on this account. There remains, therefore, if I am correct here, but two of the senses in which the term is elsewhere used, that are applicable to Christ; viz, that of derivation from the Father; and that of kingly office, or of the dignity of the Messiah.

It is unnecessary to seek for a sense *wholly* new, of the phrase *Son of God* when it is applied to Christ. *Son of God*, used in the sense of *derivation from God*, would agree either with the theory of those who hold the human nature only of Christ to be generated; or of those who believe his divine nature to be begotten. In either case, the phrase has a sense analogous to that which it bears, when Adam is said to be the *son of God*, or when all men are represented as the *children of God*. I say *analogous*; for certainly in all respects the sense could not be the same. Neither is it when applied to Adam, or to all mankind. But the idea of *derivation* in some way or other, (leaving the particular manner in each case to be defined by its peculiar circumstances,) is an idea equally common to all the three cases.

But although I admit, as will speedily appear, that Christ is called the Son of God, on account of a nature derived from God; yet I do not think this to be the only or the predominant reason, why this appellation is given to him. He is called *Son*, also, because he is the

Messiah, the Anointed One, the King and Lord of the Universe, exalted over all creatures and all worlds. Whether the evidence of what I have now stated is found in the Scriptures, is the inquiry on which, of course, the whole question turns. And to the investigation of this, we may now proceed.

*I. Christ is called the Son of God, because, in respect to his HUMAN NATURE, he is derived from God.*

You and I are agreed in respect to the twofold nature of the Messiah, a nature truly divine and truly human, united in the person of Christ. In respect to his human nature, we are agreed that it is derived from God. And *this derivation* is one reason, as I now propose to show, why Christ is called the *Son of God*. If this be expressly taught in the Scriptures, and it be not taught that he is as to his divine nature derived, then I cannot help feeling that I am bound to acquiescence in the ground of the appellation as stated by the sacred writers; without alleging a reason for the appellation, which I cannot find in the Scriptures.

Luke 1: 35. "The angel said to her, divine influence shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee; WHEREFORE (*διο*) that holy [*child*] which shall be born, shall be called the SON OF GOD."

Here then the angel of God himself has stated the ground of the appellation *Son of God*, as given to the Saviour, to be the production of his *human nature* by divine supernatural influence. "WHEREFORE the holy child shall be called the SON OF GOD." Whatever other reasons then we admit, this must not be excluded. It stands here with a prominence and a clearness, which render it impossible to obscure it.

The resemblance between the appellation here, and

that given by Luke to Adam, in his chapter of genealogy, is sufficiently obvious. Adam is called the *son of God*, because divine and supernatural power was immediately exerted, in his *creation*. “The holy child” is called the *Son of God*, because the “power of the most High” is supernaturally exercised to produce his *conception*. A common principle led to the appellation, in both cases; viz, the principle that God was, by his power or influence, in an immediate and supernatural sense, the author or father of both Adam and the “Holy Child.”

Now if the *divine Logos* was *derived* from the Father, was *begotten from eternity*, and was therefore *Son*, in the highest sense, before the birth of Jesus, I am not able to understand how *this birth could be the reason*, why Christ should be called the Son of God. The angel does not say, that the child should be called *Son of God*, because the Logos who was eternally Son should be united with him or dwell in him; but he should be called Son, because of supernatural divine power exercised to produce his conception.

The manner in which Turretine disposes of the testimony just adduced, is remarkable. “*Particula δὲ,*” says he, “*est nota consequentiae, non consequentis, significur sit vocandus Filius, non causae, quia antequam conciperetur, jam fuisse dicitur, Jo. 1: 1. Phil. 2: 6. Unde non dicit simpliciter, erit, sed κληθησεται, id est, manifestabitur.*” Tom. I. p. 331.

In respect to the passages cited; John 1: 1, asserts that the Logos was in the beginning, and was God; but John says not a word concerning *Son*, it should be noted, until he has mentioned the *incarnation* of the Logos. It is then that he speaks of the glory of the *only begotten*.

The passage in Philippians speaks of Christ as having, previously to his incarnation, been in *the form of God* (*εν μορφη Θεου,*) and equal with him, but as having assumed our nature, suffered in it, and in consequence of this, as having a name given to him above every name, and being highly exalted. As God or divine Logos, surely he was not capable of exaltation; but as Messiah, triumphant over death and hell, as the *incarnate* Saviour, he could be exalted from his state of humiliation and suffering to one of supreme dignity and glory.

All then that the passages prove, which Turretine has cited, is merely that the Logos, or the *μορφη Θεου* existed, antecedently to the incarnation. But who, except Socinians, denies this? Beyond all reasonable question the pre-existence of the Logos is established by these passages; but not his eternal Sonship. Of this, neither text says any thing.

The criticism of this learned divine on the particle *διο* is very extraordinary. He represents it as a particle *transitive*, but not *illative* here. To express his views, we must translate the verse in question thus; "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee, in consequence of which, [or, so that] the holy [child,] which shall be born of thee, shall be revealed as the Son of God." A translation without usage to support it; against the laws of the language; and without any parallel, with which I am acquainted. *Διο* is simply an abridged form of writing *δια ο*, and means, as Schleusner expresses it, *quare, quapropter, ideo, propterea*. In Hebrew-Greek, it is twice a *transitive* particle; viz. in Rom. 2: 1, and James 1: 21. But the meaning of it here, and the sit-



uation in which it stands, are both entirely diverse from the meaning which Turretine assigns it, and the situation of it in Luke 1 : 35. In Rom 2 : 1, and James 1 : 21, it is by necessity of the context, and by this only, rendered *transitively*. That necessity springs from the fact, that what succeeds the word  $\delta\omega$ , in both cases, is matter entirely diverse from what precedes ; so that to render the particle  $\delta\alpha$  by *moreover*, or *further*, *besides*, &c, is forced upon us *ab exigentia loci*.

In Luke 1 : 35, a similar translation of  $\delta\omega$  would make a mere frigid sense, or rather little short of nonsense. And what is most conclusive against any attempt to change the usual sense of  $\delta\omega$  here, is, that this particle instead of standing at the commencement of a new subject, (as it does in the cases noted above,) stands between the protasis and epitasis of a sentence ; in which position it is *always* and *necessarily illative*. Accordingly, neither Scapula nor Schneider assign to it any other sense than the illative one.  $\Delta\omega$ , says Scapula, *quamobrem, quocirca, proinde* : and Schneider says, *propter quod, propterea, deswegen, weswegen, daher*. In fact, to assign it any other sense than this, is out of question ; unless in a case of absolute compulsion, where a new subject is commenced. And of this, two instances only are produced, in all the Lexicons ; both of which differ widely in respect to circumstances and meaning, from the case under consideration.

I take it for granted, that *a priori* reasoning cannot determine the laws of philology, nor prove the *usus loquendi* of language as to  $\delta\omega$ . That Turretine felt the necessity of doing violence to the laws of usage, in the case under consideration, can not appear strange, to any one who considers how incompatible the usual sense

of the word would be with his theory, and how difficult it is to submit a favourite dogma to the simple language of the Scriptures. But that we are obliged to philologize as Turretine does, is a position which we are at liberty to doubt, without peril of the greater excommunication.

The violence done to *διο*, however, is not more remarkable, than that which is done to *κληθησεται*. “Non dicit (says he) simpliciter erit, sed κληθησεται, i. e. MANIFESTABITUR.”

First, then, that *καλεισθαι* in Hebrew-Greek often signifies the same as *esse to be*, is a thing too well known and obvious to require any proof here. See Schleus. Lex. in voc. *Καλεω*, No. 10. It is an idiom, which extends even to the native Greek; as Schleusner has shewn, on the word just cited; and Schneider, on the same word. It is therefore a version perfectly justifiable by the *usus loquendi*, if we translate, “Therefore shall the holy [child] BE the Son of God.”

But secondly, the common sense of *καλεω* is to *name* or *surname*, to *give any person or thing a title or designation*; and agreeably to this, have our English translators, faithful to the Original, rendered the verse in question. But for the sense *manifestabitur*, there is no example. It is a mere arbitrary sense imposed upon the passage by Turretine, to avoid the contradiction of his favourite theory.

But to return from this examination. We have then one *express* reason for the appellation *Son of God*, as given to Christ; a reason too which has analogy to support it. But, in analogy with other cases also, there is more than one reason why he is thus named. Christians are the sons of God, as the author of their being.

But they are his sons also for other reasons; viz, from moral resemblance to him; from being taught or guided by him; from the filial blessings which they receive; and from their spiritual birth or change. Kings are the sons of God in common with all men, as he is the Father of their spirits; but they are also the sons of the most High, on account of their dignity or elevation. Christ is called the Son of God in like manner on several accounts. His derivation, as to the human nature which he possessed, is from God the Father; although it is a derivation exceedingly diverse from that of kings; as Christ had no natural father. And even so is it, in respect to his kingly office or dignity as Messiah; this dignity being incomparably higher than that of any earthly monarchs. But this brings me

II. To the second reason, which the inspired apostles have given, why Christ is called the Son of God: viz, *the elevated dignity, that was conferred on him as the Messiah.*

In Acts 13: 32, Paul in addressing the Jews at Antioch, says, "We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, *in that he hath raised up Jesus again*; as it is written in the second Psalm, *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*"

The resurrection of Christ from the dead, then, is the accomplishment of that prediction in the second Psalm, which speaks of Christ *as Son*, and of his *generation*. But why should the resurrection of Jesus constitute a reason for the appellation in question? Others have been raised from the dead besides Jesus. The answer, as it seems to me, must be, that the resurrection of Jesus was the commencement of his elevation to supreme dignity—a pledge, an earnest of all which was to follow.

It is thus that the same Apostle seems to view the subject, in Romans 1: 4. “Constituted the powerful Son of God——by his resurrection from the dead.” The word *ὁρισθεῖος*, which in our Version, and even by Schleusner, is translated *declared* or *demonstrated*, I cannot think to be susceptible of this meaning. The proper meaning of *ὁρίζω* is to *limit, define, determine, decree*; and secondarily to *constitute*, because many things are constituted by *determining* or *decreeing*. Thus, in Acts 10: 42, Christ is said by Peter to “be constituted (*ὁρισμενος*) by God the judge of the living and the dead.” And thus in other cases, as may be seen in Schleusner.

It is sufficient to remark here, in justification of the translation which I have given, that with the exception of the case in question, no instance can be produced, in which the word has the sense assigned to it in our Version. It always has respect to something, which is *prospective* at the time when the action indicated by *ὁρίζω* took place, not to any thing then *retrospective*. Storr, many years since, made this remark upon the force of the word *ὁρίζω*; a remark, like most others which he has made on the subject of philology, proceeding from a nice discrimination of the force of language.

But be this criticism as it may, it is not very important to my design. “*Declared* or *demonstrated* to be the powerful Son of God, by his resurrection,” may still have respect, (and if this be the sense, I doubt not it has respect,) to Christ as the *Messiah*. The sense is more congruous, however, which the version above gives; and then the passage, taken in connexion with the words of Paul in the Acts, indicates that the resurrection was the commencement of that elevation to which Christ was raised; and being a part of his elevation was therefore a reason, why he is called the Son of God.



There is I think an additional reason why he is so called, the mention of which ought not to be neglected. When Christ was raised from the dead, there was the commencement of a *new life*, i. e. something analogous to birth or generation. The lowest point of his humiliation, was that of death and burial in the tomb. From the moment the new life or resurrection commenced, his elevation began. All in future was to be exaltation. By the resurrection, therefore, he was Son of God on account of a reproduction or reanimation; as well as constituted Son by being placed in the *exalted* state of Messiah, or made head over all things to the Church.

That the sacred writers do apply to him the title *Son of God*, because he is the *Messiah* i. e. the *Christ* or Anointed One; in other words, because he is the King, Head, or Lord of all things, in his capacity as the Messiah or Saviour; may be shewn by other evidence, than that which has been already adduced. Nay, that after all, this is the principal or predominant reason for giving him this appellation, will appear, as it seems to me, from the following passages.

When the Saviour appealed to his disciples, and asked them, "Whom say ye that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ (the Messiah,) the Son of the living God." Matt. 16: 15, 16.

In Mark 8: 29, the same reply is recorded in the following words; "Thou art the Christ." Now if "Son of the living God," which is mentioned by Matthew, conveyed a meaning different from that of *Christ* or *Messiah*, why should Mark omit so important an addition to that part of Peter's reply which he has recorded?

Luke has given us a form different from both the others. (9: 20.) "Thou art the Christ of God." I say a

different *form*; for this is all. To say, "Thou art the Christ," or "Thou art the Christ of God," or "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," conveys, as I think will be satisfactorily evinced, the same idea in each case.

This confession Jesus highly approved, pronounced his blessing upon it, and then "charged his disciples that they should tell no man, that he was Jesus the Christ." (v. 20.) That he was the Christ or Messiah, then, appears to comprehend the *essential part* of Peter's confession, and to convey the same idea, to the mind of Jesus and his disciples, as to say that he was the "Son of the living God." The parallelism, indeed, between *Christ* and the *Son of the living God* is so apparent, in the very mode of the expression, as well as from the nature and genius of the Hebrew language, that we can hardly doubt that the one phrase is, in this case, equivalent to the other.

But if we doubt that *Son of God* is here equivalent to Messiah or King of Israel, those doubts may be removed by further examination of the Jewish *usus loquendi*. "Rabbi," said the Israelite without guile, to his divine Master, "thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel." John 1: 49. As in the case above, *Son of God* is explicative of *Christ*; so here, *King of Israel* is explicative of *Son of God*; and if so, then the *two phrases are substantially equivalent to each other*.

On another occasion, when some who had professed to be the disciples of Jesus had left him, he said to the twelve apostles, "Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure, that *thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*."

John 6: 68, 69. The two expressions here are the same, as in the case of Peter's confession already produced. I cannot but feel that they constitute a parallelism, in the view of the apostle who uttered them; just as when Thomas said, *My Lord and my God*, he meant substantially the same thing by both phrases.

In like manner, when Jesus asked Martha whether she believed in his power to save from death those who trusted in him, she replied, "Yea, Lord; I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world;" i. e. thou art the Messiah, the expected deliverer and the king of the Jews. John 11: 27.

The woman of Samaria uses another expression, as parallel to, or exegetical of, the word Messiah or Christ. "We know this is indeed *the Christ, the Saviour of the world.*" John 4: 42.

But to show how common the idiom was among the Jews of our Saviour's time, by which *Christ* and the *Son of God* were used as parallel expressions, other instances may be adduced of its usage, out of the circle of the disciples. Thus the demons say, "Thou art *the Christ, the Son of God,*" Luke 4: 41; if the common copies of our Greek Testament be correct. Griesbach has, however, rejected the word *ὁ Χριστός* here from the text; while Titmann has admitted it, but not without an index that it is suspected.

The Sanhedrim, who examined Jesus previously to his condemnation, asked him, "Art thou the Christ?" He replied by saying, that the Son of Man should hereafter be seated on the right hand of the power of God. They repeated the question, with earnestness, *Σὺ οὐν εἶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ*; "Art thou then (*οὐν* then, indeed, verily then) *the Son of God?*" Luke 22: 67, 70. Here it is

evident that the same question, so far as the essential meaning of it is concerned, is repeated in the second instance as in the first; although the words differ, and the intensive *οὐ* is added to the second question, in order to show the earnestness of the speakers.

In like manner the high priest, during the trial of Jesus, said, "I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us, whether thou art *the Christ, the Son of God.*" Matt. 26: 63. Here both expressions meet in the *same* question; as in the case above, they followed each other in *different* questions; and both are plainly designed to make the inquiry, Art thou the promised, the expected Messiah of the Jews? Surely the high priest and the Sanhedrim did not mean to ask Jesus, whether he was eternally and necessarily begotten of God.

From the friends and the enemies of Jesus, then, we have one and the same use of the phrase Son of God, viz. to designate the Christ or Messiah, the expected King of Israel. The beloved disciple, who leaned on Jesus' bosom, has added his own testimony to this usage. Speaking of his gospel he says, "These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is *the Christ, the Son of God.*" And in the same manner, Paul in his Epistles says; "For the *Son of God, Jesus Christ,* who was preached by us;" i. e. the Son of God, viz, Jesus the Messiah. 2 Cor. 1: 19.

More cases of a similar nature might be added; but I forbear. Enough has been adduced to shew the *usus loquendi* of the apostolic age, among the Jews. Let it now be called to mind, that every writer or speaker, who means to be understood, must necessarily use language in the same sense, in which the age and nation to which he belongs use it. And if this be admitted, how



shall we avoid the conclusion, that Son of God was the designation of Christ as the expected Messiah of the Jews, as the King who was to subdue all nations, and reduce them under his government?

That the phrase *Son of God* pertains to Christ as Messiah or incarnate Saviour and exalted head over all things, and not to the Logos considered simply in respect to his state before the incarnation, may be rendered still more probable, from those prophetic texts in the Old Testament, which describe the *future* birth of the Son of God.

To begin with the famous passage in Ps. 2:7. "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." What is then the subject of this Psalm, and in what attitude does it place the personage, who is styled Son? A ready answer is afforded by the preceding verse, and by the whole context. "Yet have I set my KING upon my holy hill of Zion. I will publish the decree." What decree? Why plainly that which makes or constitutes him *King*. And what is it? "The Lord hath said to me, *Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.*" This is the decree or sentence, which constitutes him *King in Zion*. What follows this elevation? Why, that all nations shall come under his dominion, and that his enemies shall be dashed in pieces.

Surely no other generation of the Son is intimated here, but his exaltation to the dignity of King and Lord. And it is in exact consonance with this, that Peter explains the very passage in question, in Acts 13; accommodating it to the resurrection of Christ, which was the very circumstance that *commenced* his elevation to the throne of supreme dominion.

Let me present the subject in another light. The

second Psalm is *prediction*; and prediction concerning the *future Messiah*; (v. 2, מְשִׁיחַ.) As Messiah he is *King*; and as Messiah he is *Son*. But if he had been Son from eternity, could it be *prophesied* that he was *yet to be a Son*, and to be *begotten at a future period*? Or shall we with Clemens Alexandrinus say, that after the Son was begotten previously to the beginning of the world, he begat himself again in the womb of the Virgin?

In regard to the exegesis, which makes *this day* to mean eternity, because *one day* is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day, I cannot feel that it deserves a serious refutation. It is so unexampled, so evident a perversion of the design of the writer, and so plainly the result of being pressed with difficulty by the text as it stands, that it needs only to be read with candour to be rejected.

Two other passages in the Old Testament contain the phrase in question, and relate, as I believe, to Christ or the Son of God. The first, in 2 Sam. 7:14, exhibits a promise, that God at some future period would raise up of the seed of David (v. 12) a KING, (v. 13) respecting whom it is said, "*I will be HIS FATHER, and he shall be MY SON.*" The same sentiment is recognized by the Psalmist, Ps. 89: 3, 4, 20—27. In the latter passage, it is said, "He shall cry to me, Thou art my Father — *And I will make him my FIRST BORN.*"

Here we have *predictions*, not only of a *future Son*, but of a *future FIRST BORN*. I am unable to conceive, how that which existed from all eternity, should be thus spoken of as *yet to exist*, at a *future period*.

If I am correct then, the Logos, before his incarnation, was not, strictly speaking, Son of God, but only to become so by union with the person of Jesus. And is it

not thus, that the apostle John represents the subject, when he introduces the Logos to our consideration, as he existed in a previous state? Then he was *προς τον Θεον*, and was *Θεος*. But it was only after “he became flesh and dwelt among us, that the apostle speaks of “the glory of the only Begotten, full of grace and truth,” which the disciples saw. It is the “only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, (i. e. most dear to him or beloved by him,)\* that hath declared him.” Surely it is the Messiah, and he only who has made such a revelation; not the Logos before the incarnation.

Consonant with this mode of speaking is the language of Paul, when he has occasion to make a distinction between the divine and human natures united in Christ. In Rom. 9:5, he speaks of the descent of Christ *κατα σαρχα*, as to his human nature, from the Jews; but how does he characterize the *divine nature* which dwelt in Jesus? By saying that this divine nature was the *Son of God*? No; but by calling him “God over all, i. e. supreme God, blessed forever.” Such I believe the Logos to be; *supreme God*, not *derived*; not *secondary*, as Justin and other fathers call him; not *begotten*, not *emanated*, not *subordinate*. That the Son (as Son) is *subordinate* and *derived*, I most freely grant is a doctrine of Scripture; but that the Logos is so, I have found no satisfactory evidence.

I must not omit a passage in Paul’s writings which stands a few verses preceding the one just quoted. “All things,” says the apostle, “shall work together for good to those who love God——whom he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he (the

\* Compare the passage respecting the beloved disciple, who *leaned on the bosom* of Jesus. To explain the idiom, see also 2 Sam. 12:3.

Son) might be the first born, (*πρωτοτοκος*, *preeminent, first in rank or dignity*,) among many BRETHREN." Rom. 8 : 29. Now in what sense is *the Son* a *brother* of the saints? Is it as the divine and eternal Logos; or as the Logos incarnate, who had "become a partaker of flesh and blood, because the *children* partake of the same?" Heb. 2 : 14. The answer may be given in the words of Paul, in another passage. "He that sanctifieth, (Christ, the captain of our salvation,) and they who are sanctified, (Christians,) ARE ALL OF ONE; for *which cause*, he is not ashamed to call them BRETHREN; saying, I will declare thy name unto my *brethren*, &c. Heb. 2 : 11, 12.

Saints, then, are the *brethren* of Christ, because they are the *sons of God* and he is the Son of God; but can we draw the inference from this, that they have a nature really divine, because they are his brethren? Can the title, then, in itself considered, prove that Christ is a divine person; or can it be assumed, that the title *necessarily* imports this?—I know the Jews, in one instance, argued in this way; but of this more hereafter.

Finally if the title *Son* necessarily imports eternal generation and divine nature, I am utterly unable to make out any exegesis of the 1 Corinth. 15: 28. Thus the passage stands; "When all things shall be subdued unto him [the Son] then shall the SON HIMSELF *be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be ALL IN ALL*. If *Son* then be (as such) the divine Logos, be eternally begotten, and very God of very God, what is this *subjection*? And how is he, who in his divine nature is "God over all," and immutable, to become *subject* to the Father, in order that GOD *may be ALL IN ALL*? I will not say, it is impossible to solve these questions; but I must say, I can find no solution of them on



the ground, which refers the appellation *Son of God*, to the eternal generation of a nature divine.

I have produced the ground of my dissent from the doctrine of eternal generation. It will be incumbent on me, before I take leave of the subject, to notice the arguments which are adduced in support of it. But this must be reserved for another Letter.

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## LETTER IX.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

In considering the arguments adduced to support the theory of *eternal generation*, I will first follow Turretine, who certainly is one of the ablest advocates of this doctrine, and who has laid out very much of his strength in its defence.

He begins with the passage from the second Psalm; but as I have already examined this, I will not again dwell upon it. In commenting on this passage, he adverts to another in Hebrews, 1: 5; which has often been adduced, and which claims an examination. The writer of this Epistle is here endeavouring to prove the superiority of Christ over the angels. He represents him as exalted above them, because he has obtained a more excellent name than they. "For," says he, "unto which of the angels said he [the Father] at any time, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son."

It needs no argument, I suppose, to prove that the *name obtained by inheritance* cannot be *literally* understood. For then it would necessarily imply the death of the Father, in consequence of which his title descended to the Son. The whole difficulty in the passage is made by inadequate versions of it, *κεκληρονομηκεν* being translated as signifying, *obtained by inheritance*. Now nothing is plainer, than that the word *κληρονομεω*, as employed by the Hebrew-Greek, corresponds exactly to the Hebrew word יָרַשׁ; which means *to get, acquire, obtain possession of*, in any manner, or at any time. It was thus that the Israelites *inherited* the land of Canaan, from its heathen inhabitants.

Christ then is exalted above the angels, because he has *obtained* a more honorable title than they. But what is this title? Angels too are called *sons of God*. God is the author of their being. They are a bright reflection of his moral perfections. They are most like to him of all his rational creatures, of which we have any knowledge. It is not then, because *Son* designates DERIVATION from God, that Christ has a higher title than the angels, when he is called Son. For a similar reason they too might be called *Sons*. What then is the ground of preference? Why plainly the one which has already been assigned, viz, that *Son* designates Christ as *King*, the Messiah, the Head over all things, the *αρχη* ruler of the creation of God. In both the passages which the apostle quotes, the context evidently shews that the title *Son* is given to Christ, as the constituted King of Zion.

But farther. How could he OBTAIN a better title than the angels? If he were Son *eternally*, did he *obtain* a filiation? And could the prophecies quoted, speak of his filiation as *future*?

The angels are all ministering servants ;” but Christ, the “ head of the creation of God, and preeminent over every creature (*πρωτοτοκος της πασης κτισεως*;)” Christ the *Son of God*, has a rank and dignity far above them.

The second argument of Turretine is derived from Prov. 8:22; the chapter which contains a beautiful and poetic personification of divine wisdom. It would lead me into too wide a field, to discuss the subject of this text at length; a text on which all the Fathers, who held to the antemundane or to the eternal generation of the Son, placed so much reliance; in the interpretation of which they have been followed too, by the great multitude of divines in later ages. I will only say, that the preceding and succeeding context shows, that wisdom is an *attribute* and not a *person*, a virtue and not a concrete being. A better understanding of the nature of Hebrew poetry and of poetic language in general, would have saved, as I must believe, all the speculations that have been indulged, respecting this celebrated passage.

But if one must needs have it, that it shall be understood of the Logos, and his eternal *generation*; then there lies an insuperable difficulty in the way, from the language. “When there was no depths *הוֹלַלְתִּי* *I was brought forth*;—before the hills *הוֹלַלְתִּי* *was I brought forth*.” It is the action of *parturition* and not of *generation*, which is indicated by this language.

Excepting the figurative sense of *creating* or of *forming*, the verb in question has no other meaning that classes under this category. Neither of these meanings however, would comport with the Nicene Creed any better than “*brought forth*.”

3. Turretine adduces the passage in Micah 5:1, in

which it is said of a personage (the Messiah, who is to spring from, or as the Hebrew runs to *come out of* Bethlehem Euphratah,) that *his goings forth are of old*, even from *the days of eternity*. In Turretine's apprehension, this characterises the generation of the Son of God, and plainly represents it as eternal.

But the phrase is, at least, susceptible of two meanings, which differ from this; either of which appears to me more probable than this. The first is, that the Messiah should descend from a *very ancient and illustrious house*. For the words עָדָה and עַד, rendered by Turretine *eternity*, are like the Greek *αιων*, that also signifies any thing ancient, which has endured, or is to endure for a long period. The question when these words are to have the meaning of *absolute eternity*, and when the sense of *ancient* or *very old*, is always to be determined by the nature of the case, i. e. by the context. But the context, in the present case, is not sufficiently specific to determine with certainty. Of course, I must concede that the meaning of the phrase, as I have just given it, (though so interpreted by Rosenmueller,) remains somewhat uncertain.

A second meaning may be, (and most probably it is the real one,) that the personage, who was to be born, should unite with him or in him an *eternal nature*, one which did not commence with his birth in Bethlehem, but one which was eternal, or which had no beginning. Exactly correspondent with this sentiment, is that of Isaiah, in Chap. ix; where speaking of the Son who was to be born, and to be made universal King, he calls him, among other names, the *mighty God*, the *father of eternity* (אֲבִי עֵד), which I understand, with Rosenmueller, to be an idiomatic phrase, simply meaning *eternal*.



This child was to be not only a *Son* and a *King*, but the *mighty and eternal God*; i. e. in this personage, these natures were to be combined.

The same sentiment I take to be expressed by Micah. "Out of Bethlehem," says he, "shall issue (נִצָּן) a King over Israel, whose נִצָּן מִבֶּתְלֵהֶם issues, goings forth, origines, are eternal." The latter part of the verse, in respect to form, is an antithetic paronomasia of the former. As if we were to say, in English, A ruler shall go forth from Bethlehem, whose goings forth are eternal; i. e. a ruler shall be born there, who shall possess a nature that is incapable of birth; in other words, an eternal and divine nature.

Such is the natural exegesis of the passage, according to the spirit of Hebrew parallelism and poetic expression. But in this, I find no support for the doctrine of eternal generation.\*

4. Turretine, and most who agree with him in sentiment respecting the doctrine in question, deduce arguments in support of it, from the epithets which are combined with the word *Son*. These are *ιδιος own*; *αγαπητος beloved*; *μονογενης only begotten*; and *πρωτοτοκος first-born*. I will now examine these in their order.

1. *Idios own*. This epithet is applied by the sacred writers, in only one instance, to Christ. Paul says, "He that spared not his *own* Son, but delivered him up for us all, &c." Rom. 8: 32. In one other case, the Jews aver, that Jesus "not only profaned the Sabbath, but asserted that God was his own father (*ιδιον πατρα*,) making himself equal to God." John 5: 18. But that

\* What Turretine can mean, when, in commenting on this verse in Micah, he says, "Nec potuit [Filius] prodiisse a Patre nisi per generationem substantialem," I will not attempt to conjecture.

a claim to *equality with God* is not made out from this assertion, by any force of the word *ιδιος*, is sufficiently plain from comparing the tenth chapter of this same Evangelist, (verses 24—39;) where the Jews are described as having made the same accusation, on the ground that Christ had declared himself to be the *Son of God*, (v. 36,) or that God was his Father, (v. 29.)

And that no such stress can be laid on the word *ιδιος*, to prove the “*real and substantial* generation of the Logos,” as Turretine lays upon it, is sufficiently evident from the manner in which the word is employed, in other cases. Christ is said to have entered the holy place once by his *own* blood, Heb. 9: 12; and to have washed us from our sins in his *own* blood, Rev. 1: 5. In these and a multitude of other cases, where *own* (*ιδιος*) is used, it is either employed as an *intensive*, to add force and emphasis to the meaning of *his, that, &c.* as *his own, their own, &c.*; or it is placed in opposition to something that is strange, foreign, or that belongs to another. Thus, his *own* city means the city of which one is a native, or where he habitually resides, in distinction from other cities. And thus, Christ entered into the holy place by his *own blood*, means that he did not, like the Jewish priests, enter in with the blood of animals, &c.

It is however the emphatic sense of *own*, perhaps, which the passage from Paul’s Epistle requires; although the sense is good if *own* here be opposed to that which is foreign, or another’s. The meaning then would be, ‘God did not make atonement for sin, by exacting the blood of bulls and goats, or of human victims; but he gave *his own Son* to die for us.’

At any rate, Paul applies a still stronger epithet than

*ιδιος* to Timothy, who stood in no other relation to him, than that of one of his converts. “To Timothy a *genuine* Son in the faith, *γνησιω τεκνω*,” 1 Tim. 1: 2; which, in 2 Tim. 1: 1, he varies, by calling him *my son*.

But in whatever sense Christ is *Son of God*, whether his filiation be eternal, or in time he is God’s *own Son*; and the epithet *own* cannot possibly have any bearing on the question of *eternal* generation. The Son of God, if begotten yesterday, would be as truly God’s *OWN* Son, as if begotten from eternity. To call him *ιδιος υιος* then, determines nothing respecting the point in question.

2. *Αγαπητος, beloved.* A formal examination of this really seems to me needless. Is not Christ all perfect, lovely, glorious, exalted as he is—God’s *beloved* Son? And God’s *beloved* Son in a *peculiar* sense; for the reason that his character and attributes are peculiar? Yet, I could not argue the *peculiarity* of divine love toward him, merely from the fact that the epithet *beloved* is applied to him. Daniel is not only called *beloved*, but a man *greatly beloved*; David was a man after God’s own heart; Solomon was beloved of God; the church is his beloved; but these are not therefore *eternally begotten*. It is then the circumstances under which *αγαπητος* is applied to Christ, and the manner of the application, that intimate a peculiarity of meaning in his case. But this peculiarity has no concern, with any argument in favour of the doctrine of *eternal* generation.

3. *Μονογενης, only begotten.* I cannot help thinking it somewhat singular, that any argument should ever have been drawn from this epithet, to prove the *eternal* generation of the Son. Is not that generation in the womb of the virgin, by supernatural miraculous power, and on account of which the angel says he should be called the

*Son of God*, the *only* generation of the kind, which has ever taken place? Has God any other Son, who was thus produced?

Or if you understand the term *Son* as characterising the incarnate Logos, the Messiah, the supreme King; is there more than one such King? And is not *μονογενης* the very adjunct which may properly be connected with *υιος*, used in either of the above senses?

Here I might stop, then, with having shewn, that in whatever way you understand the phrase Son of God as applied to Christ, *only begotten* is strictly applicable to him. But my examination of the term *μονογενης* has ended in the conviction, that as applied to the Saviour, it is a mere parallelism of *αγαπητος*. It may be proper to state the reasons of this conviction.

In the Hellenistic Greek, both *αγαπητος* and *μονογενης* correspond to the Hebrew word יְהוּדִי *only begotten*. Thus Gen. 22: 2, "Take now thy son, thine *only* son, Hebrew יְהוּדִי, Sept. *αγαπητον*, Aquila *μονογενη*; all in the same sense. So יְהוּדִי is rendered by *αγαπητος* in Gen. 22: 12, 16. Jud. 11: 34. Jer. 6: 26. Amos 8: 10. Zech. 12: 10. Ps. 22: 21. It is thus too that Hesychius explains *αγαπητον*, in his Glossary. *Αγαπητον*, says he, *μονογενη, κεχαρισμενον*. So Pollux; "A *beloved* and only son, or a beloved daughter, is called *μονογενης*, by Hesiod." So in Homer's *Iliad*, (ζ. υ. 401) the term *αγαπητον* is explained by the Scholiast, *μονογενη*.

As applied to Christ, we find the epithet *μονογενης* used only by John; a writer whose tender heart every where flows out, in epithets of endearment. That the term indicates *special* endearment cannot be doubted; nor can we doubt that the Son of God was specially dear to the Father.



Supported by such authorities, and such usage, I hesitate not to say, it is my full belief, that *μωρογενης* as applied to the Saviour is merely a term of *special endearment*. But if it be more; then, as I have already shewn, it applies to the peculiar and *unique* generation of the Son, in the womb of a virgin, by divine power; or to the peculiar and *unique* exaltation of the incarnate Logos.

4. *Πρωτοτοκος* *first born*. This appellation has often been adduced, to confirm or prove the doctrine of eternal generation. But it would prove a great deal too much, if the term is to be literally applied. Christ is called the first born of every creature, *πρωτοτοκος πασης κτισεως*. Is the difference then between him and others, only that he was born first? He is called the *first born among many brethren*; (Rom. 8: 29) those brethren then are *born* as well as he; but he is the first in point of time.

This sense will not bear. We come, then, by necessity to the figurative sense of the word; where we find the meaning to be, *chief pre-eminent, first in dignity, command, honour, &c*; a very natural meaning, derived from the rights and privileges of primogeniture among the Hebrews. And now we have the sense of all those passages, where Christ is called the *first born*; viz, he is the head of all creation; he is Lord over the church; he is the *first born from the dead*, i. e. the Lord of those who will die no more, &c. But none of all these meanings have any bearing, that I can perceive, on the doctrine of *eternal generation*.

5. The fifth argument of Turretine is drawn from Col. 1: 15; "Who is the image of the invisible God;" and from Heb. 1: 5, "Who being the effulgence [irradia-

tion] of his [the Father's] glory, and the express image of his substance, &c."

As to the first of these passages, the context immediately going before affords an easy solution of the meaning. "In whom [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins; who is the image, &c." Now who is the *image*? He by *whose blood* we have redemption. And who is it, that shed his blood?" The preceding context tells us, that it was God's *dear Son*. Was it then the eternally begotten and coequal Son that shed *his blood*? Or was it the *incarnate Logos* i. e. the Messiah, who made atonement by suffering?

In exactly the same strain is the passage in Hebrews. "Who, (being the irradiation of his glory, and the express image of him,\* and directing all things by his omnipotent control,) having made expiation by himself for our sins, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high."

Who then made expiation by suffering for our sins? Surely the Messiah, not the eternal Logos. The same person then is the irradiation of the Father's glory, and his peculiar image.

I have reviewed the arguments, on which Turretine depends, to prove the doctrine in question from the Scriptures. I find in most of them confirmation of an opinion very diverse from his.

Some other arguments must be noticed, before I leave the subject; for I would not wittingly leave any important argument unexamined, which is brought to establish the doctrine in question.

\* *της ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ* I take to be simply a translation of the Hebrew *אִשְׁרָאֵל*, so often used to designate *him, himself, &c.*

Much reliance has been placed, on a passage in Heb. 1:2; "By whom he made the worlds," i. e. by the Son, the Father made the worlds. Now if the Logos was not Son before the creation of the worlds, how could the Father make the worlds by him?

I am rather surprised that Turretine should not have made an argument of this; for it really seems to me much more specious, than any which he has produced. I will not attempt to show that the passage is capable of a different translation; although I might say something in behalf of this. For the preposition *δια*, when governing the Genitive as here, does not always mean *by*, in the sense of *cause*, or *instrumental cause*, but plainly means, in some cases, *on account of*. See Rom. 5:19. 8:3. 2 Cor. 9:13, 14. So in Gen. 8:21. 12:13, 16, in the Septuagint, being a translation of the Hebrew *בְּלִבְיָהוּ* *because of*, *on account of*. So also in Schneider's excellent Lexicon, under No. 2 of *δια*, he gives *wegen*, *on account of*. It might be said too, since the tenth verse describes the creative power of Christ as Jehovah, that the repetition of the same sentiment in the verse in question is rather improbable; and that a more probable version of it therefore is, "on account of whom, he created the worlds;" which would comport very well with the elevation and glory of the Messiah, as displayed in the rest of the chapter.

But omitting to urge this, I am content to take our Version as it stands, acknowledging that it accords well with the predominant meaning of *δια*, when placed before the Genitive. Does the apostle, then, mean to assert or even to imply the fact of eternal generation, or eternal Sonship?

The answer to this question brings me to the consid-

eration of a special principle, in regard to the appellations occasionally given to the Messiah. It is this, that designations originally descriptive merely of quality, rank, &c, in process of time, by frequent usage, become proper names, and are very commonly substituted for them, so as to be descriptive of the whole person, or being. Such is the case with several of the names given to Christ. The very appellation *Christ*, signifies *anointed*; *ὁ χριστος* the *anointed one*, the king, the special supreme ruler of God's people. Yet this name, (the same as Messiah, being merely a Greek translation of the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ) originally applicable only to the incarnate Logos, or the Logos as dwelling among men, and afterwards reigning over them in a nature like theirs, is used also to describe either part of this compound person; the human nature, or the divine. "Of whom, as concerning the flesh, *Christ* came, who is over all, God blessed forever." Here *Christ* is used to designate both the human and divine natures. So the Spirit, which wrought in the ancient Jewish prophets, is called the *spirit of Christ*, 1 Pet. 1: 11; although strictly speaking, Christ did not appear until many centuries afterwards. On the other hand, the word *Christ* designates the human nature in countless instances. When it is said that *Christ* was born, that he laboured, suffered, died, rose again, &c, all this evidently pertains of necessity to that nature, which was capable of these changes. In nearly all the cases that occur of the use of the word, *respect* is had entirely to his mediatorial state, i. e. either to the humble, or to the exalted part of it. But, as the instances above produced show, the word in process of time became a proper name, which was capable of describing both natures; and was occasionally used, when the Saviour is spoken of as divine and not as human.



Such is the case with another term of designation, which the Saviour applied to himself more frequently than any other; I mean *Son of man*. According to the idiom of the Shemitish languages, *Son of man* means simply *man*, a man descended from human parents. But as applied to the Saviour, it means, most probably, *the seed of the woman* who should bruise the serpent's head; *the seed* promised to Abraham; *the son* who was promised to David, as the heir of his throne; *the son who was to be born of the virgin*, whose name was to be Wonderful, &c. In all these promises, there is special reference to that nature, which was to be born or generated. But notwithstanding the evident import of the title *Son of man*, according to its original use; yet it is *sometimes* employed in such a sense, as necessarily to designate a nature preceding the human one, i. e. a nature divine. "What and if ye shall see *the Son of man* ascend up, where HE WAS BEFORE?" John 6: 62. "The Father hath given the Son to have life in himself (i. e. to call the dead from their graves, to give life to the dead, comp. vs. 28, 29;) and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is *the Son of man*." John 5: 26, 27.

Surely as Son of man, or a descendant of Mary, he had not lived in heaven before his birth; nor simply as such a personage, is judgment committed to him, and the power of raising the dead. It was a more exalted nature which dwelt in heaven, before the birth of Jesus; and it was for a higher reason than that Jesus was of human origin, that he is enabled to raise the dead, and is commissioned to judge the world.

Now just what happens in respect to the titles *Christ* and *Son of man*, happens in regard to the title *Son of*

*God*. It designates the Messiah, the incarnate Logos, in its proper and original use as applied to Christ. But in after times, it was occasionally used to describe either nature. So in the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is said, "They crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh." Heb. 6. And in Acts 3: 26, Peter speaks of God's having *raised up his Son*. Many other passages of the same tenor might easily be produced, if it were necessary, in order to show that the term *Son* is occasionally employed to designate only the human nature of Christ; for surely the divine nature was neither *crucified* nor *raised up*.

In a similar way, also, the term *Son of God* is employed to indicate the *divine nature*; as in the passage in question. The sentiment is, that the Logos created the world; and so says John, in the first chapter of his gospel. That *God created the world by the Logos* imports, I think almost necessarily, a distinction in the Godhead. Does not John imply the same when he says *the Logos was with God*? But I shall not attempt to describe the nature of this distinction. The form of expression, which we are examining, does not present any more real difficulty than is presented when Moses says, "Jehovah rained from Jehovah fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrha, &c." And at most, the use of the term *Son* here would no more prove the eternal generation of the divine nature, than the use of the term *Son of man* would prove that Christ had been Son of man in his pre-existent state. (See John 6: 62.)

Indeed the very first verse of the Epistle to the Hebrews, seems pretty plainly to intimate, that the speculations of the Fathers, about the manifestations of the *Son of God* to the ancient patriarchs and prophets, are

not well grounded ; although these speculations are still very common among Christians. “God, who at sundry times and *in divers manners*, spake to the fathers by the prophets, hath in these LAST DAYS spoken to us *by his Son*.” And on the ground, that these *last days* enjoy the *preeminence* of being addressed by *the Son*, the apostle urges the danger of more severe condemnation, in case the word spoken is rejected ; Chap. 2: 1—4. Does this seem to recognize the fact, that the *Son of God* addressed the ancients ? That the Logos inspired the prophets, and appeared to the patriarchs, *may be true*, (though I do not assert it ; ) but to *later times* was reserved the peculiar privilege of being addressed by the Son of God, the *only begotten* of the Father, full of grace and truth.

In the succeeding context, moreover, Paul says ; “When he bringeth his first begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him.” From what Scripture the apostle selected this passage, cannot now be shewn, if the quotation is designed to be a verbal one. No such words are now extant in any part of the Hebrew Scriptures ; and although in the Septuagint Deut. 32: 43, words nearly the same in sound occur, the sense appears to be very different from that given by the apostle. Be this as it may ; the introduction of the first begotten into the world, whether it refer to his birth, or his official introduction, necessarily imports a time subsequent to the formation of the angels, who, as already existing, are commanded to worship him. If therefore it apply at all to the point in question, it is clearly *against* the doctrine of *eternal generation*.

In the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, is a passage, which has appeared to some, to import that

the title *Son* is descriptive of the original nature, and not the official character of Christ. The writer represents Moses as entrusted with the house or family of God, as his servant, in order to instruct them. But Christ possessed authority over this house as a *Son*; i. e. as they explain it, as one who inherits;—who has a superior claim by virtue of his derivation.

But the question, which the Apostle is endeavouring to illustrate here, is not concerning the *origin* of Moses and of Christ. The inquiry is not, Who possesses a dignity by *derivation*, which is superior. It is simply whether Moses and Christ were at the head of their respective dispensations, in the same capacity; and so whether they are officially entitled to equal honour and respect. Moses, says the apostle, was entrusted with his house, simply as a *servant*; he was, in no sense real lord over it, but only the steward of another. But Christ was *Lord* over his house; he was supreme arbiter, governor, judge; he acted not in a mere subservient capacity, but as a *Son*, (who is virtual owner of the paternal state,) he claimed and exercised dominion over it.

Exactly in conformity with this, is the sentiment of the same writer, in Chap. 1:2; which asserts that God has constituted the Son *κληρονομομον παντων heir of the universe*, i. e. lord, possessor of it. Now here is evidently the same property in the universe, which is described in Chap. iii, where his possession is represented as that of a *Son*. But could and did God CONSTITUTE the eternal and necessarily begotten and coequal *Son*, the possessor of the Universe? Or was this done, when the Messiah was exalted to the throne of universal dominion?

There is still another class of passages that often oc-



cur, in which the sacred writers speak of God's sending his Son into the world; giving his Son for us; sending forth his Son made under the law, &c; and Christ is represented as coming from God, coming into the world, &c. Passages of this class, I apprehend, produce more effect upon the belief of a common reader of the bible, in respect to the doctrine in question, than almost any other; for to one unacquainted with the original idiom of the Scriptures, such passages seem to import that Christ was *Son*, before he came into the world, i. e. as they understand it, before he was born of the Virgin Mary. On this account, I must take special notice of this class of texts.

First, then, I would observe, that one general objection lies against interpreting any of these texts in the manner described; for if filiation be understood of the *Logos* himself, it would imply, of course, that he had been *twice* Son—Son in his divine nature, and Son in his human nature; a doctrine which, although believed by some of the Fathers, and advocated in this form, is not, so far as I can perceive, taught in any part of the Bible.

On the other hand, if we suppose that Christ is called Son, as it were in the *literal* sense, on account of his supernatural birth; and Son in a *figurative* sense on account of his office; this involves nothing of the difficulties of *two literal filiations*; a doctrine which, I cannot think, will now be seriously defended.

But to review some of the passages in question. John 3: 16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." The sense of this passage, I take not to be, "He sent him to men;" or, "He gave him to men;" for then after the verb *εδωκεν*, it would have been necessary to insert *αυτω* or *κοσμου*, to designate the per-

sons for whose benefit the gift was made. The meaning is, "God gave up his Son to death on account of men. Comp. Luke 22: 19. Gal. 1: 4. Rom. 8: 32. John 6: 31. But it was not an eternal Son, who died for men.

If any, however, are disposed to call in question the interpretation just given; no advantage can be gained for the doctrine of eternal generation, by denying it. That God gave his Son for the salvation of men, is adequately explained by the fact, that the Logos became incarnate; that Jesus the Saviour was born, lived, suffered, and died for men. God did indeed *give his Son* for our salvation.

In verse 17, however, we have the formula in its full strength, on which the argument for eternal filiation is built. "God sent not his Son into the world, to condemn the world, &c." The *sending of the Son* into the world, and his *coming* into the world are correlate terms, both having reference to the same fact, namely the divine mission of Christ; the one designating the part which God performed in respect to this mission; the other the part performed by the Son. The question in both of these cases is, Does the action of *sending the Son into the world*, or of the *Son's coming into the world* relate to the *birth of the Christ*, or to his *mediatorial office among men*? If the former, it is possible that texts of this class may imply a filiation previous to his birth of Mary; if the latter, then nothing is added to the arguments in favor of the doctrine of eternal generation. It is said, John 1: 9, that the Logos "was the true light, which coming into the world enlighteneth every man." This form of expression, in general, seems more favorable to the doctrine which I am opposing, than the one in John 3: 17, *God sent—his Son*.

I will not deny, that in the Hebrew dialect, or rather in the Rabbinical, the phrase *to come into the world* frequently has reference to the *birth* of men. בּוֹא בְעוֹלָם is said of men, who enter upon the stage of terrestrial existence. But in the New Testament, the same phrase, or substantially the same, is often used in the sense of *entering upon the duties of any public office*, specially the prophetic office. Thus in John 1 : 6, it is said of John Baptist, “There was a man *sent* from God ; (v. 7) The same *came* to testify, &c.” So in Matt. 11 : 18, it is said of the same John ; “He *came* neither eating, nor drinking, &c ;” and in v. 14, “This is Elijah, who was *to come*, ερχεσθαι.” In John 7 : 28, Jesus says, “I *came* not of myself, but he who is worthy of credit *sent* me ;” in which, most evidently his mission as Messiah, and not his birth is referred to. So in John 5 : 43, “I have *come* in my father’s name,—if another *come* in his own name, &c.” Hence ὁ ερχομενος was a common title bestowed by the Jews on the Messiah ; or its equivalent, ὁ ελθων. Matt. 3 : 11. 1 John 5 : 6. But the passage, which of all makes it most clear what *coming into the world* means as applied by Jehovah to the Messiah, is found in John’s Gospel, ch. 18 : 37, “Then said Pilate to him, Art thou a King ? Jesus replied, it is as thou sayest. I am a King. For this end *was I born* ; and for this purpose *came I into the world*, in order that I might publish the truth.” The latter clause, appended to *coming into the world* in order to show the object of his public appearance, makes it absolutely necessary to *distinguish* between his *birth* and his *coming into the world*.

Rabbinic usage, also, justifies this explanation. רַב אָרָא *the master has come*, means that he *teaches*, or is *teaching*.

One other consideration must not be omitted. If the *birth* of Jesus be meant here, by his *coming into the world*, in what sense can it be said that he was the *true light* (*φως αληθινον*) that *enlighteneth* every man? Was he indeed so by his simple birth, and his thirty years residence in private life, and in obscurity? Or was he the *true light* then, and only then, when he came into the world so as to become the *teacher* of mankind?

Uniting all these considerations, the proof becomes, to my mind, irresistible, that the Son's *coming into the world*, and being *sent into the world*, relates to his public and prophetic office, and not to his birth.

In Rom. 8: 3, God's *sending his Son in the likeness of sinful men*, is so plainly an instance which relates to the incarnate condition of Christ, that comment is unnecessary. In Rom. 8: 23, "God gave up his Son for us all," is a clear case of devoting him to an expiatory death; which was not suffered by a nature immutable and divine.

In Gal. 4: 4, it is said, "God sent forth, (*εξαπεστειλεν*) his Son, born of a woman, and born under the law, in order that he might redeem, &c." Here it is the Son *born of a woman, and born under the law*, who is sent forth, and who redeems; not a Son *eternally* begotten.

In Acts 3: 26, Peter speaks of God's *sending his Son*, *after* he had raised him from the dead. But what Son died; and what Son was raised from the dead?

In 1 John 4: 9, it is said, "God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live by him;" and in the next verse, "He sent his Son to be a propitiatory sacrifice for us;" and in v. 14, "The Father sent his Son, to be the Saviour of the world." Comment on these verses is unnecessary, after what has been already exhibited, in respect to the idiom of John.



These passages exhibit, as I believe, all the varieties of the phraseology in question. If there be any that have escaped my notice, I think they will present no more difficulty, than those which have already been examined.

Two passages of a peculiar complexion, in the Gospel of John, remain yet to be examined. John 5: 18, it is said, "The Jews sought to kill him (Christ) because he not only violated the Sabbath, but said that God was his own father, making himself equal to God."

The first question that arises here, is, Does the Evangelist mean to aver, that *saying God was his own Father, was making himself equal to God?* Or does he mean to state this, as the conclusion of the Jews from the words of Jesus? Most evidently the latter; for in the very clause before, we find "because that he (Christ) profaned the Sabbath," which surely we are not to understand as the allegation of the Evangelist, but of the Jews.

The Jews, then, said that Christ made himself equal to God, by asserting that he was the Son of God. But did the Jews, in their zeal to ensnare the Saviour by his language, and in their bitter persecuting fury, always act the part of candor, in deducing conclusions from what he said? Nothing can be more unsafe, than to trust to such expositors of the Saviour's words.

In the very case under consideration, the context (v. 16) informs us, that the Jews "persecuted Jesus and sought to kill him," because he had healed the sick man at the pool of Bethesda, on the Sabbath. "Jesus replied, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. On this account the Jews sought still more to kill him, because

he not only profaned the sabbath, but said that God was his own Father, making himself equal with God."

Observe now, how they pervert the expression *my father*, so as to make the intensive accusation, "Said that God was *his own* Father." And what follows? Why that if he said God was *his own* Father, he claimed a *speciality* of Sonship, which was supernatural ; and *therefore* made himself equal to God.

The reply of Jesus to this embittered accusation is such as was calculated to abate the force of that conclusion, which they had drawn from his calling God *his Father*. "Jesus answered, I solemnly assure you, the Son can do nothing of himself but what the Father does." (v. 19) That is, the appellation Son of God does not mean, of course, as you have interpreted it, a claim to full equality with God, you deduce more from my words than they will bear. Your accusation of blasphemy is not well grounded.

That the nature of this reply has been correctly represented here, is very strongly confirmed by a similar passage in John 10: 33—39.

The Jews had taken up stones to cast at Jesus, because he had called God his Father. Jesus inquired what reason they had for doing so? They replied, "because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered, Is it not written in your Law, I have said, ye are gods? Now if those are called *gods*, to whom the word of God was addressed, (and the Scriptures cannot be disannulled,) Say ye of him whom the Father hath consecrated and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said I am the *Son of God*?"

That is ; "If princes, who were addressed in the 82d Psalm, were called *gods*, by the inspired writer,

(and surely you will not call in question the propriety of what is contained in your own Scriptures;) is it blasphemy for me, who have been consecrated by most special acts on the part of God the Father to the duties of my office, and sent forth among men to fulfil them, as the Messiah, the great Prophet who was to be raised up among you;—is it blasphemy for me, to call myself the *Son of God*?" In other words; If worldly rulers and Kings are called *gods*, with propriety called so, is it then blasphemous for me, who am King of kings, and Lord of lords, the Messiah of whom all the prophets have spoken such great things, to call myself the *Son of God*? Surely I may, without any blasphemy, ascribe to myself a title lower than that which the Scripture bestows upon them?

It is very evident, in this case, as in the parallel one already noticed, that the simple design of Jesus, in his answer, is to repel the unjust accusation of the Jews; unjust, because that calling God his *Father* gave them no ground to draw the conclusions which they did. By giving himself the title *Son of God*, he did not, according to the *usus loquendi* of the Jews, expose himself to any such conclusions as his malignant accusers drew from it. Hence in both cases, he repels the accusation, by alleging that they have deduced more from his words, than they had any right to do; that if rulers may be called *gods*, with more propriety still may he appropriate to himself the title, *Son of God*.

In fact, the Jews were not offended that the title Son of God should be given to the Messiah. They surely expected this; as appears from the manner in which they understood the passages in the second Psalm, in 2 Sam. 7: 12—14, and in the 89th Psalm; for they con-

strued these as predictions of the Messiah. But they were offended, that a Galilean, a person of obscure birth, who originated from a despised village, and was of a humble appearance, who rejected all claims to worldly splendor and power, and submitted to the Roman despotism which oppressed his country, should arrogate to himself the titles and honors of the Messiah.—This was what they could not endure. Their malignity towards Jesus, on account of their disappointed worldly hopes, was so great, that it exhibited itself in every shape; and in no way more frequently, than in endeavouring to entrap him in his words, and to deduce from them matter of accusation. Nothing then, can be more hazardous to sound interpretation, than assuming the position, that they construed the language of Jesus in a right and candid manner.

In answering them, and repelling the force of their accusations, I regard the Saviour as neither renouncing nor asserting his proper divinity. He simply used such arguments as were founded in truth, and which repelled the attacks of his adversaries. Farther than this prudence would not permit him to go, at such a time. If the Jews were so violently enraged, because he had claimed the character and name of the Messiah, as exhibited in their Scriptures; would they have borne with his advancing claims to a truly divine character; or were they in a condition to hear these claims advanced, and to examine them with candour?

Is it probable too that Jesus, who so often exhibited himself as a preacher of truth not only forcible, but well timed and exactly adapted to the circumstances of his hearers; who so frequently charged his Apostles not to publish among the Jews that he was the Christ; and so



frequently enjoined upon those whom he had healed of distressing maladies, that they should not make him known; and this because of some peculiar prejudice among the Jews at that time against him, or special exasperation of mind towards him, so that they were not in a condition to hear and candidly examine the declaration that he was the true Messiah;— is it probable, that Jesus would have then produced his *most exalted* claims before the Jews, when they were so much enraged, as they plainly were, in each of the cases which we have just been considering? The answer, to every one who well understands the character and conduct of the Saviour during his mission among the Jews, cannot be difficult.

But there is another circumstance, in the passage from John x, which must not be passed in silence. This is, that the reason which Jesus gives why it was proper for him to call himself the Son of God, is, that “the Father had consecrated him, and sent him upon his mission;” i. e. the Father had consecrated him to the office of Messiah, and had sent him to fulfil the duties of it. But this is surely a very different reason from that which the Jews assigned; and very different from his being called Son, because he was *eternally* and *necessarily begotten*.

One other argument employed to defend the doctrine of eternal generation, but not drawn immediately from the Scriptures, I must not omit to notice. In substance it is this. “*Father* is the distinctive title of the first Person in the Trinity, *as such*; consequently the correlative title of *Son* seems to be called for by the second person *as such*. And unless the second person of the Trinity be distinguished by such a title, by what appropriate name are we to call him?”

The first part of this argument, if I rightly understand it, is a *petitio principii* in respect to the point in question. Is God the *Father* so called in respect to his relation to the other persons of the Godhead, or, if you please, to the eternal Son; or is he styled *Father*, on account of his relation to his creatures, and to the Son supernaturally conceived in the womb of the Virgin, and exalted to the Messiah's throne? Here is surely a question; the answer to which cannot be *assumed*, but must be supported by arguments.

On p. 84, you have said, very justly, that "the kind of distinction expressed by the word *person* in the Godhead—we do not know; and that it is not explained in the Scriptures." How then can it be said, (as in p. 90) that *Father* is the distinctive title of the first person in the Trinity, *as such*? If we neither know what the distinction is, nor have it explained by the Scriptures, how can we affirm, that the terms *Father* and *Son* are used as a characteristic designation of original relations in the Godhead. The Scripture that would support this, must be the Scripture which would prove the *Son* to have been eternally generated; and as I have already examined this subject, it would be improper for me to repeat my views of it in this place.

There is surely no more *necessity* of supposing that God always existed as a *Father*, than that he always existed as a *Creator*, or *Governor*. Surely he was not a creator before he created; nor a governor before he had subjects. Nor is it any more congruous, to suppose that he was a *Father* before he had a *Son*. The question then returns; When was the *Son*, *as such*, (not as *Logos* but as *Son*) generated? To assume, that it was from eternity, and that *Father* expresses eternal relation, is therefore *petitio principii*.

On the other hand; if *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* are words, which designate the distinctions of the Godhead *as manifested to us* in the economy of redemption, (which after the preceding investigation I cannot doubt;) and are not intended to mark the eternal relations of the Godhead, *as they are in themselves, and in respect to each other*; then we may easily account for these designations, without being obliged at all to recur to the supposition, which you seem to think inevitable.

As to the rest of the difficulty proposed by the argument; no great effort surely could be necessary to substitute other names for those of *Father and Son*, if it were expedient. Doubtless it is not expedient; for shall not Christians use, and delight to use, those appellations, by which God, in the economy of redemption, has revealed himself to us? And may they not view them, (the names and the relations revealed to us, not the actual distinctions of the Godhead) as springing out of the economy of redemption? I see no more difficulty in it, than in supposing that the name *Creator* sprung from the act of Creation; or *Lord* from the act of governing all things created.

But while I believe this, I have no imaginable objection to speaking of *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* in such a way now, as to designate the distinctions of the Godhead thereby. My reason is, that they have become, *by usage*, PROPER NAMES; and therefore no objection can lie against such usage. But when the inquiry is, whether these names originally came from internal distinctions in the Godhead, or from the manner in which the Godhead is revealed to us in the economy of redemption, something more than a popular view of the names becomes proper.

But to the question, What title distinguishes the second person of the Trinity *as such*, (i. e. as the Godhead is in itself,) an answer may surely be given; and a Scriptural one too. John tells us that the *Logos* was *in the beginning*, and *was God*; and that *when he became flesh*, we beheld the glory of the *Only Begotten*. Here then is a name, for the second distinction of the Trinity as such, which is of apostolic authority—of inspired origin.

After all, it seems to me that *things* rather than names, are the principal subject of our inquiry. If I might insist on *names*, I would ask, how can Christ be called the *everlasting Father*, as he is by Isaiah? How can the *Son* be the *Father*? But in doing this, I should think myself employed in a manner that would not well comport with sincere desires, to find what is true rather than what would perplex.

But it is time to bring this long letter to a close. I do not pretend to have examined in it all the texts or arguments, which have ever been adduced to support the doctrine in question; but I have not purposely neglected any that are known to me, which I have deemed of sufficient importance to notice. My aim is to find what is true; not to use the art of a disputant, who is merely desirous to maintain that side of a question which he has espoused.

And now, in view of this examination by the light of Scripture and reason, what says conscience to the doctrine of eternal and necessary generation? I am very far from undertaking to speak for others; but for myself, I cannot, in conscience, admit the doctrine in question. I do sincerely believe it is not only inconsistent with the fundamental predicates of that awful BEING, who is SELF EXISTENT and INDEPENDENT and IMMUTABLE;



but I must believe, after as thorough an examination as I have been able to make of the Scriptures, that it has no support in the word of God. Nay, so far from this is it, that it does contradict and oppose the *usus loquendi* of the sacred volume. With such views, can I follow the Council of Nice; or must I follow what I regard as the plain dictates of Scripture and reason? I cannot hesitate a moment which to do; nor, with my convictions, would you hesitate a moment in rejecting the doctrine in question. Whether the reasons which satisfy my mind will be sufficient to satisfy the minds of others, is more than I would venture to predict, and can be known only from the result of experiment. That experiment, the love of truth (unless I deceive myself) induces me to make, in submitting these reasons to your eye and to that of the public. It is time the question were settled in the minds of those who love the Saviour, and that it should no more be a cause of difference or alienation between them. If these Letters should contribute to elicit a discussion, in which truth, whatever it is, may be developed in a manner satisfactory to the minds of all, it will not be in vain that they have been written.

## LETTER X.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

The design of the present Letter is to make several miscellaneous observations, which seem to me expedient, before I take my leave of the subject.

The strength with which you have stated your conviction of the error of those who reject the doctrine of eternal generation, when you say, "It is a most presumptuous assumption of the principle, that God is a being *altogether such an one as ourselves*;" that it is "as UNPHILOSOPHICAL as it is IMPIOUS;" and that "where this doctrine is abandoned, neither the doctrine of the Trinity nor the Divine character of the Saviour will be long retained;" (pp. 86, 88, 90,) induces me to solicit your attention, for a few moments, to some considerations respecting this aspect of our subject.

With you, I can easily admit that it is *philosophical*, to suppose that God, who has existed from eternity, *may* have acted from eternity. There can be no objection to this. But is it *philosophical*, first to lay down the position, that it is an *essential* characteristic of God to be *independent* and *self-existent*, and then to say that an *emanated, derived, generated being* is or can be really God, in this high and only true sense? If it be replied, that the *manner* of generation, emanation, or derivation is totally different, in the case under consideration, from any thing of this nature, in respect to what is created or human; I accede. About the *manner*, I have not one word to say. Let it be as mysterious, or as different

from human or created productions or emanations as can be imagined, and I have nothing to oppose. But the *manner* must not be confounded with the *fact itself*. If *generation*, or (to use the word which you seem to prefer, p. 87,) *emanation* from God do not mean *derivation*, in some sense or other, *as a fact*; then, without the fear of being unphilosophical, I make bold to say that to my mind it appears an unmeaning term. But if it do mean *derivation*, in any method, then it is impossible, for me, with the views which I now have of the nature of things and of language, to see, that a *being derived* can be a *being self-existent and independent*; and impossible for me to regard as God *supreme*, a being that is not *self-existent and independent*. These predicates enter *essentially* into your definition and mine of *Godhead*; at least they do in every case, where we are not in a polemic attitude.

May I now be indulged in a few remarks, on the allegation that those who reject the doctrine of eternal generation will not long hold to the doctrine of the Trinity and of the Divine character of the Saviour?

I know not what ground, in point of fact, there is to draw this conclusion. The second generation of ministers is now passing from the stage in New England, who have *rejected* this doctrine; and apostasy has been no more frequent among them, than among their brethren, who have *embraced* it. It is indeed true, that the strong hold of Unitarianism, in this country, is in the heart of New England. But it is not true, that one third of the clergymen even in Massachusetts belong to the Unitarians; and without the pale of Massachusetts the number is too small to be worth computing, in comparison with the orthodox. But it remains to be shewn, that the re-

jection of the doctrine of eternal generation was the leading or introductory step to our Unitarianism. Far different causes have operated, in producing this effect; causes which it is not my object now to describe; and the consideration of which should not be mingled with the present discussion.

I am unable to see any *approximation* in our opinions to Unitarianism. We do believe there is a distinction in the Godhead, the nature of which, as you yourself justly state, p. 84, *the Scriptures have not explained*. On this distinction, (which we can hardly venture with you to explain as merely *a three fold mode of existence*, p. 84, but which we suppose may be something more than *mode of existence*.) are founded the various appellations and exhibitions of the Godhead, in the Scriptures. We believe that the Logos is truly divine; divine in a *supreme*, not in a *secondary* sense; and that the Logos did unite himself with "the holy child, that was called the Son of God," so as to form, in a manner inscrutable to us, one person; of whom could be predicated, with equal truth, a nature human and divine.

Does your sentiment, now, offer any advantages to those who believe in the essential divinity of Christ, either in comprehending this truth, or in defending it, which are not offered by the sentiment which we embrace? I confess, for myself, I cannot help feeling, that the idea of a *derived* God is, in reality, a vastly greater approximation to Arianism, than that which we adopt; and that the antagonists of Arius had much less reason to dispute with him than they apprehended. For one, I am altogether inclined to say, with good Irenaeus, "There is nothing in God which is previous or subsequent, or more ancient; consequently no emanation



of this kind can take place." (Lib. II. c. 13.) I cannot but rejoice, at finding in the disciple of Polycarp, the intimate friend of the apostle John, ideas of God which appear to me so rational and Scriptural.

The fathers in general, nurtured in the bosom of heathenism and emanation philosophy, and being concerned with those to whom an *emanated* God would not be objectionable, do not appear to have apprehended any thing repulsive in the doctrine of generation as to the divine nature. I am unable to accord with them here. The pure, and spiritual, and immutable nature of God, (a truth equally consonant with the Scriptures and with reason,) is so deeply impressed upon me, that I feel an instinctive repulsion to any approximation towards such an idea of the Godhead, as interferes with these essential predicates. And I must confess, that with the views which I now entertain, if I could be persuaded that the doctrine of eternal *emanation* or *generation* is true, I should feel that the first step was taken towards embracing the Arian system.

I am no *Subordinarian*, in any shape whatever, as it respects the Logos, previously to the incarnation and in himself considered. A *subordinate God* is, to my mind, a contradiction of terms; unless the word God is used in a metaphorical sense. I believe in the *full, proper, supreme divinity of the Logos*; that he is *self-existent, uncreated, unbegotten, not emanated*. Is this approximation to "denying the Trinity and divinity of the Saviour?" If it be, I am greatly in error, and wholly unable at present to discern it.

Supposing now I were to accuse my Brethren, who embrace the doctrine of eternal generation, of verging to Arianism; would it be a well grounded accusation?

By no means. They assign to Christ the attributes which make him the object of their religious homage, gratitude, and love. They worship him sincerely. I would aim to do the same ; but I cannot speculate with them, in every respect, about his nature. I go *farther* than they do. As God, I assign him *self existence* and *independence*. They refer these only to the Father ; at least if they speculate with Bishop Bull, and Subordinarians in general, they do so. Now which of these speculative views attributes the *highest* honour to the Saviour ? But I forbear to press this question. With all my heart I believe them to be sincere disciples and worshippers of the Saviour, and esteem and love them as such. I say only, that with my views of the nature of the Godhead, the doctrine of eternal generation would be the first step for me towards Arianism ; and that it appears to me in reality to differ much less from it, than has been generally supposed.

I would not intimate a doubt that the Nicene fathers meant, with full and sincere purpose, to oppose the doctrines of Arius. But in what respects was the opposition made ? On what points did it light ? The answer is not difficult to any one who reads attentively and understandingly the history of those times, when the disputes with Arius were carried on. The great fact, that the Son of God, in respect to his nature as Logos, was a *derived Being*, both parties fully acknowledged. In regard to Arius, this will not be questioned ; and in regard to his opponents, the Nicene creed is demonstrative evidence of this. The point mainly disputed was, whether Christ was derived from God by *generation* and *from eternity* ; or whether he was produced by *creative power*, and was “ the beginning of the creation of God.”

I am not supposed to call in question the comparative superiority of the Nicene doctrine, over that of Arius, in respect to spiritual ideas of the divine nature; or in respect to consistency. Both believed Christ to be the creator of the world, and the object of religious worship. With what consistency Arius could maintain this, is a question that can be solved, only by a view of the imperfect notions of the divine nature, that pervaded the age in which he lived. And the Nicene fathers (more consistent and more spiritual in their views, because they represented the Creator of the world as *eternal*,) fell far short of ascribing that exalted character to the Logos, which he truly sustains. While both parties, then, acknowledged a *derived Divinity*; while both agreed to call him God; and to represent him as the creator of the world, and the object of religious worship; and only disputed about the manner and time of his generation; I have felt it to be no presumption to say, that Arius and the Nicene fathers differed much less, in *real* sentiment, than is generally supposed.

What was wanting in respect to cause of dispute, however, they supplied by vehemence of manner, and warmth of feeling. Both parties were bent on carrying their point. That the Nicene fathers succeeded, is matter of sincere joy to me. I look on Arianism as a very great advance towards heathenish ideas of the nature of the Divinity. The Nicene fathers were surely more rational, in maintaining that the Creator of the world and the object of religious homage must be eternal, and homoousian with the Father. But after all, to represent him as *derived* and *dependent*; what is this but to stop short of assigning *full, essential, supreme* divinity to the Logos?

If you or others should understand any thing which I have said on this subject, as designed to convey the most distant reproach, to those who embrace the doctrine of eternal generation, it would be a subject of sincere mortification and regret to me. Nothing is farther from my intention than this. But in shewing what reasons I have, to believe that your fears about the rejection of the doctrine in question are not well grounded, it seemed to me unavoidable to state my views in respect both to the Nicene creed, and to the sentiments of those who opposed it; and to endeavour, if possible, to convince you that we are in reality farther from rejecting the proper divinity of Christ, than our brethren who adopt the Nicene creed.

I cannot but feel that it is important, also, (if you will permit me to turn your attention to a different topic,) that we should unite in some plain and obvious principles, in respect to the interpretation of all those passages of Scripture, which speak of the being and predicates of God. This is essential to unity of sentiment, in the result of our investigations.

With regard to some obvious principles, we are undoubtedly in perfect unison. We believe that God is a being purely spiritual and incorporeal. Of course, all those parts of Scripture, (and they are very numerous,) which attribute to him eyes, feet, hands, and heart; or walking, moving, ascending, descending, approximating, and receding; or which attribute to him anger, vengeance, fury, hatred repentance, &c; or exhibit him as whetting his sword, bending his bow, preparing his arrows, brandishing his spear, &c; we agree to construe as *figurative* language. They indicate, in our view, only something possessed, performed, or threatened, on the part of



God, which has some analogy to like things among men, but which must never be so understood, as to interfere with the idea of his pure and perfect, spiritual and immutable nature. The Anthropomorphites, in the time of Origen, argued from the passage in Gen. 1:26, which speaks of man as made in the likeness of God, that God had a bodily form and organs; as do the Swedenborgians of the present day. But Origen, who had clearer notions of the spirituality of the divine Being than most of his cotemporaries, in reply to this argument, asks them whether men have seven eyes; as the prophet asserts that Jehovah has seven. The spirit of this reply is sufficient to meet all the objections that Anthropomorphites can bring, to the principle which we admit.

Let us now proceed one step further. On the supposition, that there are passages of Scriptures, which speak of the Logos as *eternally begotten*, (which you seem to assert on p. 86, but which I find not in the Scriptures,) would it of course follow, that a *real and proper generation* was intended to be indicated, as Turretine, Gerhard, and many others have asserted? I think not: and my reason is, that the nature of God, as a *self-existent, independent, and immutable Being* forbids us to apply such an exegesis; provided we admit that the Logos is, as the Scriptures assert, *supreme God*. *Derivation* is incompatible with these predicates. All the similies used to illustrate the nature of it, and to justify the opinion in question, are essentially defective; or else convey notions utterly inconsistent with the doctrine of Christ's true divinity. Take the favourite one of light proceeding from the sun. Is not the irradiation of light, it is asked, coeval with the existence of the sun? As a philosopher, I should surely answer, No. For if the sun

is the *cause* of irradiation, in the order of time and of nature the *cause* must precede the *effect*. But dismissing this, and admitting that they are coeval; are they homousian—the same substance—*numerically* the same? Turretine, Gerhard, and others who agree with them, represent the Son as having the *same numerical* essence as the Father. But is the light, which flows from the sun, is the *effect* of it, and spreads itself over the universe, the *same numerical* substance as the sun, which remains a solid substance, the *cause* of light, and undiffused?

With venerable Irenaeus, I protest against all such similies, as amounting to nothing but specious deception, in our reasonings about the nature of the Deity. They are utterly incompetent to answer the object for which they are designed.

I should feel compelled, therefore, to assign some other meaning to the word Son, than the literal or proper one, if I should find it in Scripture, in such a connexion as I have above stated. I should think it to be either an appellation of endearment, or of office, or of dignity, or of equality. Of *derivation* as applicable to a *God supreme*, I could not well think.

There is yet another point, on which I must say a few things, before I take my leave of the subject.

It has hitherto been a very severe task for those, who believe in the doctrine of *eternal generation*, and of course understand the term *Son of God* as in itself implying a nature divine, to explain those passages of the New Testament, which speak of the *Son* as not knowing the day nor the hour, when the destruction of Jerusalem would take place, Mark 13:32; which represent the Father as greater than the Son, John 14:28; which

speak of God as exalting him above every creature, Phil. 2: 9; and which represent him as finally becoming subject to the Father, that God may be all in all, 1 Cor. 15: 28.

I will not undertake here to criticise on the interpretations which they have proposed; but one thing must be plain to the reader who is not biassed by the sentiments, which the authors of them adopt: I mean, that they do, and must do, great violence to the obvious import of the language; which is irreconcilable with the idea that Son of itself indicates a nature truly Divine. On the ground where I stand, the difficulty vanishes, if the double nature of the person of Christ be admitted. The Son of God i. e. the Messiah was in a humble station, he suffered, he died, he rose from the dead, he was exalted to supreme dominion, he holds it still as the vicegerent of God, governing the world in our nature exalted; he will continue to do this until the mediatorial work is finished; and then the duties of the office which he sustained being all accomplished, the office itself will no more be needed. *Son*, therefore, does primarily indicate the inferior nature as united to the divine; a nature that could suffer and could be exalted; a nature, of course, inferior to that of the Father. But, as happens in other cases and as I have already stated, it *sometimes* is used as a *proper name*, to indicate the whole person of Christ. This, however, as I have also endeavored to show, is very far from justifying the use made of this term, to prove the doctrine of eternal generation.

But I must hasten to take my leave of this protracted discussion. Will you permit me, with the most sincere respect and fraternal affection to say, that in times like these, which "try men's souls," and promise to exa-

cerbate the trial, it bodes well to the cause of truth, if those who worship the same God and Saviour, who flee for refuge from the consequences of their guilt, and for deliverance from the power of corruption, to the atoning blood of Jesus and the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, forgetting the lesser differences which may divide them in regard to the *manner* of certain truths, unite heart and hand in promoting the kingdom of that Saviour whom they adore. Sure I am, that it is not a subject of any unkind feelings, of any suspicion, nor the occasion of any want of entire confidence and cordiality in me towards my Christian brethren, that they believe in the doctrine of eternal generation; and it is not to oppose them, nor to urge them into dispute, that I have thought it proper to publish the preceding Letters. My motives, if I know my own heart, have been, the desire of having truth developed, and of using my feeble efforts to prevent a breach of perfect cordiality, between brethren who agree in doctrines that are essential; and whose disagreements consist principally in *words*, or at most in what is speculative rather than in what is practical. If I have expressed myself with freedom, it arises from the strength of my own convictions, in regard to the views which I entertain. But I trust that freedom has been guided by respect to those who differ from me, and who are entitled to my fraternal affection and Christian confidence.

Was it improper to make an effort to convince you, that, so far as our principles are concerned, we are not so near to Unitarianism as you seem to apprehend; or to show the Christian public, that we are, in reality, no nearer than those who differ from us, in regard to the doctrine in question? If you or they can be convinced



of this, the danger of division among brethren will be lessened, and the bonds of fraternal and Christian affection cemented.

But if, after all, you still think we deserve the reproof which you have administered, I shall greatly regret it. I desire ever to say, "Let the righteous smite, it shall be excellent oil to my head." But when he smites for that which is a matter of conscience and deliberate conviction with me, I must have, at least, the privilege of saying, *Παταξον μεν, ακουσον δε.*

And now I have only to add, that if what I have written can be shewn to be inconsistent with the Scriptures, with the natural attributes of the divine Being, and with Christian piety, I will blot it out forever, and weep in secret places over an error which contributed, in any way, to dishonour that Saviour, in whom are all my confidence and hope. Show me and my brethren our error, and we will never cease to thank you for a kindness so important to our welfare and usefulness. If we are not deceived, we hold our minds open to examination. *Audi alteram partem* is a maxim which a Christian, who earnestly seeks for truth, is bound never to forget. To show us what the Nicene fathers believed will not—cannot satisfy us. The fact we can easily admit; but the inference, that we are to believe as they did, and because they so believed, neither you would urge, nor we admit.

Nothing but the respect and affection which I have for you, would have induced me, at present, to undertake the laborious investigation through which I have passed. But I acknowledge, that the manner in which you spoke of the sentiments that I embrace, did constrain me to re-investigate them, from a sense of Christian





